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Monday, 11 December 2006, 10.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Al-Nasser	(Qatar)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Biabaroh-Iboro
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Shinyo
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Matulay
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Ms. Wolcott Sanders

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2006/945)

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06-65176 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2006/945)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Qazi to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/945, containing the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and by Ms. Jackie Wolcott Sanders, representative of the United States, on behalf of the Multinational Force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ashraf Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

Mr. Qazi: The Secretary-General's report before the Security Council provides a sober and urgent warning that Iraq stands on the brink of a civil war and chaos. In my briefings to this Council, I have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that the achievements of the political transition process in meeting the benchmarks endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1546 (2004) have not translated into an improved security or human rights situation. Efforts made by the Government of Iraq and the Multinational Force have not prevented a continuous deterioration of the security situation, which, if not reversed, will progressively undermine Iraq's political prospects.

Initiatives launched during the period, such as the 2 October Ramadan declaration, the meetings sponsored by the Ministry of National Dialogue, and the Mecca Declaration, under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, as yet have had no impact on the violence and bloodshed. The Baghdad security plan, aimed at isolating troubled neighbourhoods and improving living conditions for their residents, has not expanded beyond the initially selected areas. The violence seems out of control. This has provoked widespread concern for Iraq's future.

While 8 out of 18 governorates account for 80 per cent of the attacks on the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) and the Iraqi security forces (ISF), those 8 governorates account for a significant proportion of Iraq's population. The restoration of peace and stability in the capital and its surrounding areas is therefore critical to the peace and stability of Iraq as a whole.

Given the current lack of political unity, the fragmentation of Iraqi society and the paralyzing levels of violence, it may not be realistic to expect the Government and parliament to bring about progress without the active cooperation of the regional and international community. Nor in these circumstances can multilateral partnerships, such as the International Compact for Iraq, be expected to realize their full potential, since they are predicated on the Iraqi Government being able to implement the requisite political, security, economic and social reforms. The International Compact will itself require a viable

security and political environment. Accordingly, it is very encouraging to note that the Iraqi Prime Minister and his Cabinet have indicated their full commitment to making the Compact process a success.

Vigorous efforts are under way to build up Iraq's armed forces and put in place effective command and control, disciplinary and organizational structures. Significant progress is being made in some respects. However, even under the most propitious of circumstances, the development of self-sufficient security forces of the requisite professional capability and political discipline is expected to take some years, and may take much longer. Moreover, the key issues confronting Iraq are not amenable to solutions based on force alone. Excessive reliance on the use of force could indeed preclude negotiated compromise — the only sound basis for stability.

If Iraq is to stand any chance of avoiding a national catastrophe, a collective sense of urgency, resolve and compromise is essential. Zero-sum solutions are not compatible with political stability and national security. Accordingly, the international community and regional States have a real stake in assisting the Government of Iraq to overcome the current challenges. There is no merit in arguments that assume pessimistic outcomes in Iraq, because for the people of Iraq, for its neighbours and for the wider world, failure in Iraq is not an option. A collective international and regional initiative in support of the efforts of the Government of Iraq to reduce the current levels of violence and resolve key issues is the only way forward. There is no alternative.

In my discussions with Iraqi leaders from across the spectrum and with many representatives of many of Iraq's neighbours, I have been struck by the unanimity with which they now recognize that Iraq's problems cannot be addressed by concentrating exclusively on the domestic political dynamics of Iraq alone. Therefore, a broader and more inclusive political approach is required that involves all the main neighbours of Iraq, as well as the P-5 countries. It must also involve all the main political forces inside Iraq that are prepared to foreswear violence as a political tool and to come to the negotiating table. An exclusionary approach, whether internal or external, will not result in progress towards peace and stability.

None of this alters the fact that the Iraqis above all must take responsibility for their future. Yet the structure of the situation in and around Iraq requires that all regional countries see that it is in their interest to contribute to the peace and unity of Iraq as a matter of priority and to participate in efforts to ensure that their contributions collectively assist the Government and people of Iraq. In this respect, it is encouraging to note that the Government of Iraq has decided to send envoys to its neighbours to prepare the ground for a possible regional conference.

To replace the current climate of fear and mistrust, a reconciliation process should address sensitive issues rather than postpone consideration of them. In his report, the Secretary-General draws attention to the way in which a genuine constitutional review process could provide the framework for national reconciliation. To date, the opportunity provided by this review process has not been seized as effectively as the United Nations had hoped and advised. Technical revision needs to be backed by genuine political negotiation on key issues aimed at making the constitution a genuinely workable national framework document.

The issues on which Iraqi consensus is urgently needed are clear. They include a political vision for the new Iraq, a fair sharing of oil revenues that guarantees all the peoples of Iraq an equal share in its unity and prosperity, a realistic sharing of powers, including collection of taxes among the centre, the regions and the governorates that enables the central Government to deliver essential services, the development of Iraq's security forces into genuine national institutions that are trusted and respected throughout the country, the progressive disbanding of militias and other illegal armed groups so that the State has a monopoly over the use of force as the guarantor of the rule of law, ensuring effective human rights protection systems and an effective judiciary, encouraging Iraqi civil society to foster the emergence of issue-based, non-sectarian politics, and finding a mutually acceptable way to discuss the future of the MNF-I's role as a key component of a national reconciliation process. In this regard, it is again encouraging to note that the Government of Iraq is actively preparing for a national reconciliation conference on, I understand, 18 December and that progress on a draft text for a hydrocarbon law has been made.

In his report, the Secretary-General has suggested that a regional contact group, assisted by the United Nations, could serve as the catalyst to bring about a

credible forum where such issues could be discussed and progressively resolved. There is an urgent need to develop a momentum for peace and stability in Iraq through an intensive and sustained engagement with the regional and international community in support of the Government of Iraq's national reconciliation efforts.

The Secretary-General has called for a negotiated settlement to break the cycle of violence that currently threatens to abort any political progress. This will be a complex and difficult task, but one that is unavoidable. The human costs of the present situation make it mandatory upon all of us to assist the Government of Iraq in discharging its role successfully. According to some estimates, the humanitarian and human rights crisis is arguably already the most compelling in the world. According to some estimates, more than 5,000 Iraqis die violent deaths a month. Since the Samarra incident of 22 February 2006, nearly half a million Iraqis have been internally displaced. The exodus of Iraqis to neighbouring countries is placing a heavy burden on those countries. In the event of a further deterioration of the security situation, a major humanitarian and refugee catastrophe could ensue.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has been repeatedly reminded of the high expectations that Iraqis have of the United Nations in enabling the protection of their rights and bringing an end to their suffering by facilitating processes that can put the promise of peace and security within their grasp.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the Security Council for its continued support, as most recently expressed in resolution 1700 (2006). I wish to assure Council members that the United Nations Mission will remain actively engaged with national, regional and international actors to help Iraq arrest the further deterioration of an already critical situation. That is a moral and strategic imperative that none of us can afford to ignore.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Qazi for his briefing on the most recent developments in the situation in Iraq and for his efforts in that country.

Ms. Wolcott Sanders (United States of America): As requested by the Security Council in resolutions 1546 (2004), 1637 (2005) and 1723 (2006), I am pleased to report to the Security Council, on behalf of the 25 countries making up the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I), on the Force's progress towards fulfilling its mandate.

There have been a number of important developments in this reporting period. We welcome the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 1723 (2006) to extend the Multinational Force mandate and the arrangements for the Development Fund for Iraq and the International Advisory and Monitoring Board. The MNF-I continues to play a vital role in the security and stability of Iraq and to work in partnership with Iraqi authorities to support the transition of security responsibility to Iraqi security forces. As noted in the 17 November letter from the Secretary of State to the Council President in support of the Multinational Force mandate (S/2006/899, annex), the Government of Iraq and the MNF have three common goals: Iraqi assumption of recruiting, training, equipping and arming of the Iraqi security forces; Iraqi assumption of command and control over Iraqi forces; and transferring responsibility for security to the Government of Iraq.

The Iraqi Government has made progress on its ambitious reform agenda. On 10 October, the Iraqi Council of Representatives adopted a new foreign investment law. The Council also passed a federal regions law on 11 October that will allow Iraq's provinces to hold referendums to merge themselves into larger federal regions. That law is to come into effect in 2008. In addition, a constitutional review committee was established on 25 September to explore options for amending the Iraqi Constitution.

Progress continues as well on the International Compact with Iraq, an Iraqi initiative to create a new partnership with the international community and build a strong framework for Iraq's continued political, security and economic transformation and integration into the regional and global economy. The final preparatory meeting took place in Kuwait on 31 October, and the Compact was endorsed unanimously by the Iraqi Council of Ministers on 26 November. The Compact is expected to be finalized by early next year, we hope, with broad and active international support.

Despite progress on those fronts, security remains a grave concern. Sunni insurgent attacks against the Iraqi security forces and the MNF-I remain at high levels, and the forces continue to experience attacks

from armed Shia groups, especially in the Baghdad region. At the same time, sectarian violence, much of it directed toward civilians, has increased.

Insurgents, extremists and terrorists continue their attacks. The ongoing violence continues to take a toll on the country and its people. The number of attacks increased 22 per cent over this reporting period, attributed in part to a spike in violence during Ramadan. Fifty-four per cent of all attacks occurred in two of Iraq's 18 provinces, Baghdad and Anbar, although violence was significant in Diyala province and in the cities of Kirkuk, Mosul, Basra, Al Amarah and Balad. The Multinational Force in Iraq and Iraqi security forces continued joint efforts to address security in Baghdad and Basra.

More Iraqi units are taking the lead in combat operations against the insurgency. In October, the Fourth Iraqi Army division planned, coordinated and executed an Iraqi-controlled division-level operation in Kirkuk in response to the spike of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devise attacks just prior to and during Ramadan. The operation was the first division-level plan executed under control of the Iraqi ground forces command headquarters.

The rise of sectarian violence has become the greatest threat to security and stability in Iraq. Approximately 80 per cent of the sectarian violence in Iraq happens within a 35-mile radius of Baghdad. In response to the worsening situation, Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Maliki announced a four-point plan on 2 October to unite Shia and Sunni parties in his Government behind the drive to stop sectarian killings that have plagued the country. The Iraqi Government has also sponsored a series of four reconciliation conferences across Iraq aimed at promoting a national dialogue and soliciting recommendations for action. Two meetings of tribal leaders and civil society have already taken place. In October, the Organization of the Islamic Conference hosted a gathering of Sunni and Shiite religious leaders in Mecca, which called for an end to sectarian bloodshed in Iraq.

While infrastructure attacks have decreased, they average one per week and hamper the provision of essential services, such as electrical power, water and fuel. The ongoing attacks and the difficult security environment are impediments to improving the supply of those essential services. The Iraqi infrastructure will continue to be a high-value target for disruptive elements.

The Multinational Force in Iraq continues to train, develop and contribute to the capabilities and readiness of Iraqi security forces. Iraq is making progress in building security forces that are capable of independently combating insurgents and fighting terrorists. The Ministry of Defence and Interior security forces continue to increase in size and capability, and are increasingly taking over leadership roles in fighting insurgents and terrorists. On 21 September, MNF-I transferred Dhi Qar Province to provincial Iraqi control, putting security responsibility in the hands of the provincial Governor and his local police force of 10,000. The Multinational Force continues to support and assist the Iraqi security forces as they move towards conducting fully independent operations and achieving security self-reliance.

The number of counter-insurgency operations conducted independently by Iraqi forces as a percentage of total combat operations continues to increase steadily. One hundred and six Iraqi army and special operations battalions and 11 strategic infrastructure battalions are now conducting counter-insurgency operations, with 98 battalions assessed as capable of taking the lead in operations or of operating independently.

The Iraqi Government, alongside MNF-I, has identified a force structure to maintain a security environment that will provide a basis for transitioning Iraq to security self-reliance. The authorized end-strength force structure of Iraqi armed forces is 137,500 personnel, including one Iraqi ground forces command, 10 divisions and 36 brigade headquarters, 114 army and special operations battalions, 17 strategic infrastructure battalions, six air force squadrons, three navy squadrons, and 19 combat support battalions.

The Iraq Ministry of the Interior, with the assistance of MNF-I, has begun a multi-phased national transformation plan to assess National Police battalions' current capabilities, reinforce police training, and establish practices for continuing education of the police forces. The end-strength force structure for all Ministry of the Interior forces is 188 ˆ00 trained and equipped personnel manning two division headquarters, nine brigade headquarters, and 27 combat battalions. The force structure plan is designed to enable a stable civil security environment

that leads to a democratic and representative Government and a prosperous economy.

As of 13 November, six Iraqi army division headquarters, 30 brigade headquarters and 91 battalions have the security lead in their areas of operation. Those numbers reflect approximately 70 per cent of the Iraqi army. The Multinational Force has transferred 55 of the 110 forward operating bases to Iraqi control.

The United Nations continues to play a crucial role in Iraq's stability and development. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is providing important expertise under its mandate, which was extended in August 2006 for another year under resolution 1700 (2006).

Due to security concerns, the United Nations recently decided temporarily to reduce staff positions in Baghdad. A robust UNAMI presence remains essential to supporting Iraqi efforts, including on national reconciliation, constitutional review and future provincial elections. The UNAMI presence will also be crucial in taking forward work on the International Compact jointly with the Government of Iraq. In addition to Baghdad, the United Nations has limited representation in Irbil and Basra. MNF-I continues to assist UNAMI and to help it achieve its goal for a full, robust and secure presence in Iraq.

Multinational forces, notably the Georgian, Romanian and South Korean contingents, continue to provide security for the United Nations in Baghdad, Basra and Irbil, respectively. Those troops provide static site security, reconnaissance, security patrols, convoy escorts, checkpoints and, when necessary, medical and emergency evacuation. Contributions to the Trust Fund to Support the Distinct Entity Created to Provide Security for the United Nations Presence in Iraq will ensure continued support for that critical security function. Under a separate United Nations agreement, Fijian troops also provide static and close-in protection for United Nations personnel and facilities in Baghdad.

The implementation of Iraq's national reconciliation plan will be an important component in the Government's efforts to build a united country. Concerted efforts to control sectarian violence and confront the insurgency remain critically important to Iraq's future. Training and equipping of the Iraqi security forces continues, and we anticipate a continued process of transferring security responsibility for specific areas from MNF-I to the Iraqi authorities. MNF-I continues to support the Iraqi Government as it prepares to assume full responsibility for the country's security.

Iraq's stability and security is a regional issue as well as an international issue, and Iraq's neighbours have an important role to play. We call on the entire international community to support Iraq's sovereign Government and assist efforts for a democratic, united and prosperous Iraq.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to thank Ambassador Qazi for his introduction of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2006/945). I also wish to thank Ambassador Wolcott Sanders for her briefing.

Allow me to make the following comments.

Unfortunately, my delegation agrees with the observations made by the Secretary-General. We reiterate our deep concern about the increasing violence and great suffering of the Iraqi people. The numbers set out in his report are terrible: more than 7,000 persons killed in two months — 5,000 of them in Baghdad — over 1.5 million internally displaced persons and 1.6 million refugees outside the country. The violence, which is becoming increasingly sectarian, threatens the very unity of the country and poses risks to the stability of the region. Given that situation, today each of us clearly realizes the need to explore new solutions. From the point of view of my delegation, those should be based on three pillars.

The first is to relaunch the Iraqi political process to allow for reconciliation and acceptance of the new institutions by all members of society. In that regard, we hope that the proposals of Prime Minister Al-Maliki on the holding of a national reconciliation conference will be followed up positively. We also agree with the Secretary-General that the constitutional review — a concept that was agreed in October 2005 — is a key element in establishing national consensus. We would also like to commend the efforts of Mr. Qazi and the in-depth dialogue he is carrying out with all Iraqi officials.

The second pillar is to restore Iraq's sovereignty. France has always believed that a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops could contribute to stabilizing the situation. My delegation is pleased to

note that prospects for such a withdrawal, which are of course contingent upon a sovereign decision by Iraq, have been very clearly set out for the first time in resolution 1723 (2006). The establishment of the Iraqi Government's authority could also provide a way of achieving a solution to the critical problem of militias. The latest human rights report of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq states that they have been operating with "almost total impunity".

With regard to the third pillar, namely, the support of the countries of the region and the international community, French Minister for Foreign Affairs Philippe Douste-Blazy recently recalled that all the countries of the region must be brought on board once they have shown a willingness to contribute to Iraq's stability.

France is also considering with interest the Secretary-General's idea for an international conference that includes all Iraqi protagonists and external actors concerned — potentially along the lines of the November 2005 meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh. Such an initiative could help to reach collective decisions on measures aimed at guaranteeing the unity, sovereignty and independence of Iraq. We are prepared to consider proposals by the Secretary-General, along with any clarifications that Mr. Qazi may eventually make, in particular as regards prospects for a regional dialogue and an international conference.

France is aware of the difficulties of the situation in Iraq and of the very courageous efforts by the people and leaders of that country. The international community must continue to play its role in assisting Iraq and its leaders. France intends to play its full part in that regard.

In that connection, my delegation would like to commend the contribution made by the Secretary-General in his latest report. We pay tribute to his outstanding efforts in the past 10 years in connection with the issue of Iraq. To echo his comments, it was one of his greatest challenges.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): I wish to thank Ambassador Ashraf Qazi for his lucid and comprehensive briefing on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq and on recent developments in that country. I would also like to thank Ambassador Jackie Wolcott Sanders for her briefing on the activities of the Multinational Force in Iraq. Finally, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for submitting the tenth report (S/2006/945) to the Security Council on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Both the briefing by Ambassador Qazi and the report of the Secretary-General paint an alarming picture of Iraq. Of course, through the media, we all have the chance to see on a daily basis the carnage that is taking place in Iraq. It is not important to try to find the most appropriate adjective to describe the current situation there. What is important is the fact that hundreds of people are being killed and wounded daily. No matter what label we attach to that, the current reality in Iraq is unacceptable by any standard.

The alarming deterioration of the security situation in the country, despite the successful completion of the transitional political process as envisaged in resolution 1546 (2004), begs the question: "What should be done now?" That question needs to be answered not only by the Iraqi Government and by the Government of the United States, which leads the Multinational Force in Iraq, but also by the United Nations, and by the Security Council in particular.

For the two years that Greece has served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, much of our attention was focused on the political process in the hope that progress and success in that field would have a positive impact on the security situation. We genuinely hope and believe that an all-inclusive and participatory political process will pave the way for national reconciliation and for the consolidation of national understanding based on the institutionalization of a consensus-building national dialogue enshrined in the constitution and supplemented by the Constitutional Review Committee.

Iraqis were to take their fate and their destiny into their own hands by opting for democracy, peace, stability, unity and prosperity for the benefit of all Iraqis regardless of race, allegiance, sect or tribe — a common goal for a common promising future. So far, that has not materialized.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2006/945) provides us with an overview of the current situation and an outline of new approaches needed at the national, regional and international levels, in order to achieve concrete results on all fronts — security, political, economic and human rights — and to reverse current political and security trends in the country. While we share many of the observations contained in

the report of the Secretary-General, what will be required before we can continue to build upon what has been achieved so far — for much has been achieved in Iraq over the past three years, notwithstanding the security situation — is an in-depth analytical understanding of the reasons that lie behind the increase in sectarian violence and insurgent and terrorist attacks, as well as in criminal activities. An in-depth look into what is fuelling sectarian violence and what is causing insurgent and terrorist attacks and into what is allowing criminal activities to thrive may help to reveal what are the most appropriate instruments to put into play to help address those challenges effectively.

There must be help towards creating a national compact to complement the International Compact and to assess and reassess the posture of the Iraqi security forces in countering and preventing terrorist attacks and criminal activities, including possibly by broadening the scope of existing initiatives to include, inter alia, either the permanent members of the Security Council, as suggested in the report, or even the newly established Peacebuilding Commission.

Even though our tenure on the Security Council is coming to an end, Greece will continue to support and to actively follow all efforts aimed at assisting Iraq's fledgling democracy to flourish and to thrive so that we may quickly see a prosperous, unified, pluralistic Iraq in which there is full respect for the human rights of all Iraqis and for the rule of law — an Iraq that will be at peace with itself and with all its neighbours, and a valuable partner in the international community.

Mr. Estremé (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, on behalf of the Argentine delegation, I wish to thank Mr. Qazi for his presentation of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Iraq (S/2006/945). In general, my delegation is in agreement with the main comments and recommendations of that report. I also thank Ambassador Wolcott Sanders for her presentation on behalf of the Multinational Force.

Bearing in mind that this is probably the last time my country will have the opportunity to take the floor on this subject as part of its current mandate as a member of the Security Council, I wish to present some comments concerning recent developments in the situation in Iraq, and future prospects based on that difficult situation.

Over the past two years, the Argentine delegation has sought to support the approach proposed for the normalization of the situation in Iraq, according to which, as the political process advanced and Iraqi sovereignty was restored, the level of violence would decrease and Iraq would stabilize as a sovereign country. As part of that process, democratic institutions would be consolidated, responsibility for security would be transferred from the Multinational Force to Iraqi forces and the extremist elements who supposedly were the main causes of the violence would be isolated.

The current situation in Iraq shows that that approach has not been effective and that a new strategy must be considered — both internally and internationally — in order to normalize the situation in the country and to avoid a civil war which would have devastating consequences for the entire region.

Argentina cannot fail to express its alarm at the suffering of the Iraqi civilian population. Quite apart from the statistics, which vary in terms of the number of civilians who have died or have been displaced as a result of the violence since March 2003, it is evident that the Iraqi people are suffering a crisis of great proportions. The humanitarian situation involving human rights is extremely serious in Iraq.

At this stage of events, it is clear that the deterioration in the security situation has not resulted exclusively from the actions of extremist or terrorist groups. That analysis has been shown to be superficial and ignores a much deeper reality: a sectarian conflict that has been complicated by the actions of sectarian militias and death squads which, in some cases, are connected with Iraqi political parties. The high daily number of victims of the conflict not only contributes to the increasing feeling of insecurity, but also generates a massive displacement of people and feeds into Iraqi society's pessimism about the future.

The political and constitutional process, unfortunately, has not had the positive effect we would have liked to see and has not contributed to creating a climate of reconciliation and harmony among all Iraqi communities, as had been predicted. Despite the efforts made over the last three and a half years, it has not been possible to build Iraqi security forces capable of meeting the challenges that Iraq continues to face. Hence, thus the presence of international forces continues to be necessary. We remind all forces that are

working to maintain security in Iraq — whether Iraqi or international — of their obligation to respect, under all circumstances, human rights and the provisions of international humanitarian law.

The deterioration of human development indicators in Iraq in recent times is an additional sign of the long-term effects of the situation and of its extremely negative effects on health, education and social services, the economic situation and unemployment. At stake is the future and viability of Iraq as an independent and united State.

That gloomy picture indicates that if the situation is not reversed, Iraq will continue to descend into civil war. In order to avoid that situation, a new strategy must be urgently designed for Iraq that will include complementary elements at the local, regional and international levels. The Iraqi Government has the primary responsibility to move that process forward and should promote an inclusive political process encompassing all communities. In order to do that, key decisions must be taken with regard to the distribution of natural resources to benefit all sectors of Iraqi society and to develop genuinely representative political institutions.

Recently, some positive initial measures have been taken. These should be strengthened through a genuine process of constitutional reform which after significant delay has recently been launched. Additional efforts should also be made to promote reconciliation. In that regard, there exist some national and regional initiatives such as that of the League of Arab States, and they should be explored in all their aspects. All national strategies should be complemented by additional measures on a regional level. Without an active participation of countries in the region in the process of normalization of the situation in Iraq, all efforts at the national and international level will be in vain.

At this level, there are already some concrete initiatives that show some possibilities and they should be studied by this Council. On the international level, we should sustain and support the efforts being carried out on the other two levels. Within this framework, the hosting of an international conference on Iraq could be a useful mechanism to demonstrate the support of the international community for the future of Iraq. We believe that all interested parties should be invited to participate in this conference, including all of Iraq's neighbours.

In parallel, we should continue with our efforts to launch the International Compact with Iraq, which will establish a framework for cooperation in the medium and long term between the international community and Iraq.

The role of the United Nations in these three areas is crucial. While we are grateful for efforts undertaken up until now and we would like to acknowledge the work that has been done by Special Representative Qazi, we believe that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) must provide active support to the work being done in the three areas that we have mentioned in order to harmonize the work in all of these three areas.

In the current difficult circumstances, the options facing Iraq are clear. Either the country continues along the path of sectarian violence and civil war, or it reverses this trend, favouring harmony and unity. Argentina hopes that, in the end, the people and the leaders of Iraq will choose the second option and that this Council will support this strategic decision.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Qazi for his briefing, as well as the representative of the United States for the report on the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF).

The circumstances under which we are meeting today are critical for Iraq. The situation has gotten worse and it could get even worse. There has been an intensification of the sectarian violence. We are far from a reconciliation. Reconstruction is not advancing and hopes are turning into desperation. We are a long way from a stable, sovereign, united, democratic and pluralistic Iraq that we wanted to build after the transition established by Security Council resolution 1546 (2004).

The report of the Secretary-General and all of the information provided by independent sources from the area indicate clearly that, given the external intervention and the internal political situation, the outlook in Iraq is very gloomy. The level of deterioration of the situation should lead to significant changes in the strategic orientation and in the identification of new ways and means that are

necessary to bring about stability in Iraq. It is necessary to act to deal with this reality.

The security and humanitarian situation, the social conditions and the political landscape are all areas which show extensive deficiencies. The result is that the predominant social sentiment in the civilian population is that of helplessness and despair. The reconstitution of social fabric and credibility for the Iraqi people are essential to move out of the crisis.

It is obvious that we need to address simultaneously all of these aspects. We need to give a greater space for political dialogue to promote participation and commitment, even beyond the territory of Iraq, without forgetting the protection of the civilian population, in order to avoid open conflict which some extremists are trying to precipitate. The Iraqis, first and foremost, their Government, and the neighbouring countries and the main players of the international system present in Iraq and the international community should be involved urgently in the current situation to support stability in Iraq.

In this respect, Peru supports all initiatives that will contribute to restoring trust between the various sectors of Iraq, whether that be of domestic origin, such as the Constitutional review process, or measures promoted by the League of Arab States or the Organization of the Islamic Conference, for example. All of these initiatives can contribute to bringing about national reconciliation.

Peru condemns the sectarian violence and the acts of intolerance. We reject all terrorist acts that have been committed in Iraq. We consider that those responsible for security in Iraq should fulfil their duty to protect civilians and maintain the rule of law as well as the fundamental rights of citizens. We must remember that there will be no democracy in Iraq if impunity continues. We also hope that the establishment of institutions such as the national human rights commission will be able to be brought about as soon as possible in order to move forward towards building the rule of law and a legal system.

The reconstruction task in Iraq is another central aspect. Unfortunately, in that area, once again, there are significant delays. There is a lack of investment that has an impact on the economy and public services, such as health, which has given rise to some disturbing indicators. The international community must continue its support to restore the economy. The International Compact with Iraq is a positive initiative that is moving in the right direction.

Finally, my delegation would like to express its support for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). We believe that it should continue in accordance with its mandate and to the extent possible on the ground, to support and consolidate all activities that will lead to political and legal stability, to institutional and economic reconstruction, to the provision of humanitarian assistance and to ensuring that human rights are respected in Iraq.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the report of the Secretary-General. We thank Mr. Qazi for his presentation this morning and Ambassador Sanders for hers on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF).

The security situation in Iraq is serious. Addressing this situation is the top priority for the Government of Iraq and for the MNF. But military effort is not sufficient to guarantee security. It must be underpinned by a political solution involving genuine reconciliation. We can do even more to support the Prime Minister's efforts aimed at bringing the different parts of Iraq together, so as to give effect to the will of the Iraqi people as expressed in their democratic elections.

Therefore, we strongly support Prime Minister Maliki's National Reconciliation Plan, which provides a framework for political dialogue and disarmament. We also commend the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) to promote this plan.

As set out in the Secretary-General's report, a United Nations-facilitated meeting of Iraq's political parties would offer a useful opportunity for dialogue. Such a meeting might be set up in concert with a meeting of Iraq's neighbours to further the reconciliation process.

The United Nations plays a significant role in the reconstruction of Iraq and in helping Iraq to find the political solutions it needs to guarantee its security. We appreciate the difficult circumstances UNAMI works under and we fully support its efforts. We encourage the United Nations to pursue further steps to improve the security of UNAMI, and to pursue those steps with partners as necessary, including through discussion

with the European Union, so that the United Nations can play its full role in Iraq.

We believe that the continued significant presence of UNAMI is vital to help Iraq continue to make progress in the political process. We urge United Nations Members to contribute further funding to the United Nations Security Trust Fund so as to enable the continued presence of UNAMI.

We support the legal assistance given by UNAMI to the Council of Representatives with regard to the establishment of the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq. Once the draft law has been passed, technical and timely support from UNAMI to build the Commission will be a substantial and important step towards the success of the provincial elections in 2007 and a referendum on the constitutional review.

We welcome the intention of the United Nations to provide strong support to the constitutional review process and an eventual referendum on the status of Kirkuk. The wider experience of the United Nations in this field underlines its importance as an independent mediator and its ability to present technical and impartial advice to the Review Committee and the subcommittees.

We appreciate the role that the United Nations has taken as a co-chair of the International Compact. The Compact provides an opportunity for the wider international community and the Government of Iraq to focus on political, security and economic reform. We welcome the United Nations approach of providing targeted institutional and operational capacity-building support, including the work of the UNAMI Human Rights Office on establishing a national human rights commission. That will help the Government of Iraq to deliver on its commitments.

We welcome the emphasis placed by the Secretary-General on regional dialogue. It is important that all of those who are engaged in Iraq's transition — but particularly those in the region — live up to their responsibilities by supporting the Iraqi Government and ensuring that Iraq is able to proceed down the democratic and non-sectarian path. We welcome Iraq's commitment to the International Compact, made by Prime Minister Al-Maliki in the Baghdad Coordination Group on 10 December, as well as his commitment to the political, economic and security strands. We commend the proposed discussions between Iraq and its neighbours, with the participation of the Secretary-General's Special Representative, who, of course, continues to have a key role to play in and for Iraq.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for today's briefing on the challenging realities in present-day Iraq. We agree with his conclusions and assessments. We have every reason to expect that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and Mr. Qazi personally will continue their efforts to help the people of that country and that they will remain most actively involved in the political process, acting as mediators among the various Iraqi factions and communities.

It is obvious that the situation in Iraq is extremely complex. Recently, the country has once again been experiencing an acute military and political crisis. Intensive sectarian violence threatens a territorial break-up of the country, and terrorists and insurgents are continuing their activities. Unfortunately, the formulas put forward by the Iraqi authorities and the international community to address the situation, cited by the Special Representative in his briefing, have proved unsatisfactory.

We must make every effort to prevent the eruption of a full-scale civil war in Iraq and to put an end to the rampant activities of militias and armed groups. We must do our utmost to protect the human rights of civilians, who are the primary victims not only of terrorists, but also of the militias. Otherwise, the country's people will have no confidence in the current Government.

We are alarmed at the massacres, arbitrary arrests and secret detention facilities described in the report, along with the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. The growing exodus of refugees from Iraq and a growing number of internally displaced persons is extremely troubling. In the Middle East, a situation is emerging in which, together with millions of Palestinian refugees, there is now a multitude of people who are leaving Iraq. The destabilizing impact of this turn of events is not hard to imagine.

We are convinced that in order to successfully address the many problems relating to a settlement in Iraq, it is essential to build a society based on national reconciliation and consent. Genuine progress in that area continues to be lacking. We therefore hope that the constitutional review process will enter the concrete

implementation phase and that there will be an inter-Iraqi conference on national unity. We believe that UNAMI and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General must take a most active part in organizing and holding such an essential and long-awaited initiative.

The international community must now do its utmost to provide appropriate and impartial assistance aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement in Iraq. We noted with great interest the idea — referred to in the Secretary-General's report — of establishing a regional group on Iraq that would include the five permanent members of the Security Council. In that regard, we emphasize once again the need for forums such as the Cairo and Sharm el-Sheikh meetings, which enabled representatives of Iraq, neighbouring countries and other interested countries to engage in fruitful exchanges of views. We must keep the potential of such meetings in mind.

In conclusion, we call upon the people of Iraq to exercise restraint and to remain composed at this very challenging and crucial time in the country's history and not to respond to the provocations of extremists, who are seeking to lead the country into the chaos of civil war.

Ms. Taj (United Republic of Tanzania): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Qazi for his briefing and the Secretary-General for his tenth quarterly report on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq, particularly those of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (S/2006/945). We also thank Ambassador Sanders for her update on the operations of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

My delegation wishes to commend UNAMI and other United Nations agencies for their dedicated service in Iraq in a most challenging environment. We are gratified to note that they have been able to continue to provide and coordinate access to basic services, including through efforts to restore public infrastructure and to provide assistance to internally displaced persons, whose numbers have been increasing, as we heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The unprecedented level of violence in Iraq is very worrying. It has resulted in many deaths and injuries, damage to property, extreme hardship and suffering. Particularly disturbing is the number of innocent civilians, including women and children, who have fallen victim. The urgency of restoring order — especially in Baghdad — cannot be overemphasized. Regional and international efforts must be enhanced to help contain the current sectarian strife in Iraq and prevent it from escalating further. The war has divided a people who were once seemingly united and has aggravated sectarian differences that had hitherto not been so divisive.

We commend the Iraqi security forces, working in collaboration with the Multinational Force, for their dedication in confronting the violence. But more must be done. Deliberate and determined efforts should be augmented to deal with the extreme violence and replace it with democracy and the rule of law, which we hope the political negotiations on the constitution will also address.

We support the efforts of the Prime Minister, Nuri Al-Maliki, in his search for peace, which has included meeting key international players to seek their support and guidance. We also support the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group and welcome other ideas and contributions that can turn the current situation around. Recent pronouncements and commitments for peace on the part of the neighbouring countries in the region are an important signal that must be capitalized upon.

The work towards an International Compact with Iraq is timely and deserves support from donor countries and financial institutions. Prime Minister Al-Maliki's national reconciliation plan also deserves full support. Consensus-building should include the various divergent communities and their religious leaders. We therefore look forward to the outcome of the conference on national reconciliation scheduled for 18 December.

As they seek to rebuild their institutions, Iraqis will require assistance from the international community. We urge generous and timely support for that war-torn country.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Qazi, for his briefing. We would also like to thank Ambassador Wolcott Sanders of the United States delegation for her briefing.

We have carefully read the report of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, which is very comprehensive and contains some impressive ideas.

The Iraq war ended more than three years ago. Since then the Iraqi people have travelled an extraordinary road. They have overcome many difficulties and basically achieved various benchmarks set out in resolution 1546 (2004). We would like to convey to them heartfelt congratulations for those accomplishments.

However, despite the important progress made in the political process in Iraq, an examination of the current situation there shows that security, economic reconstruction and the protection of human rights remain sources of great concern. The question of Iraq has once again given rise to universal concern. Secretary-General Annan points out that the prospect of all-out civil war and even of regional conflict has become much more real.

The United States Iraq Study Group recently published a report that put forward some new ideas and ways of thinking aimed at resolving the Iraq question. All sides can take this opportunity to reconsider the issue in a comprehensive manner with a view to finding a proper solution and helping Iraq to set out on the road to peace, stability and development at an early date.

China believes that, in order to properly resolve the Iraq question, a number of aspects need to be taken into account.

First, Iraq should continue to promote the national reconciliation process and enhance the inclusiveness of the political process. The realities of the past few months have shown that the sectarian conflict has become a major factor affecting security and stability in Iraq. China welcomes the national reconciliation plan put forward by Prime Minister Al-Maliki. We hope it will effectively encourage all parties to take the overall interests of the country to heart, showing mutual respect, understanding, tolerance and trust for each other, and jointly create a good future.

Secondly, the Iraqi Government should shoulder more responsibilities for maintaining security and law and order in the country so as to restore the popular confidence in the Government. The Multinational Force should also signal that it will not stay in Iraq forever, so as to improve its image in Iraq. Meanwhile, the Iraqi Government and the Multinational Force should realize that it is impossible to resolve the security question solely by military means. It is necessary to deal with the political, economic and security aspects of the problem if it is to be resolved effectively. A national reconciliation process that is broad and inclusive will greatly help all sides to resolve their differences through democratic and peaceful means.

Thirdly, the Iraqi Government should quickly make progress in economic reconstruction and allow the Iraqi people to enjoy real benefits. The International Compact launched jointly by the Iraqi Government and the United Nations provides an important platform for mobilizing international support and crystallizing international consensus. China fully supports the International Compact and hopes that it will be able to play its due role at an early date.

Fourthly, the international community — especially the countries in the region — should come together to help Iraq to achieve stability as soon as possible. The Iraq question cannot be resolved without the support and help of neighbouring countries. Security in Iraq directly impacts the security of all the neighbouring countries. We welcome the periodic regional meetings of the Foreign Ministers and the Ministers of the Interior of Iraq and neighbouring countries. We hope that all sides will continuously increase mutual trust through dialogue.

When the time is right, we could also consider convening an international conference, under the auspices of the United Nations, to promote dialogue and understanding.

China has always stood for the maintenance of Iraq's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and the proper resolution of the problem through political means. We hope that, with the support and help of the international community, the Iraqi people will, through their tireless efforts, achieve the objective of an Iraq governed by the Iraqi people and restore Iraq to its past glory.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): I would like to join my colleagues in thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Qazi, and Ambassador Wolcott Sanders for their informative briefings on, respectively, the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Multinational Force.

Iraq is at an important crossroads, as observed in the Secretary-General's report. Iraq — the people and

the Government — continues to be confronted with mounting, complex internal challenges in achieving national reconciliation, ensuring security in communities and promoting reconstruction and development. Of particularly serious concern is the deteriorating security situation, which is characterized by increasing sectarian violence and insurgent and terrorist attacks in many parts of Iraq.

Japan condemns any acts that may contribute to destabilizing the situation in Iraq, including the terrorist attacks in Sadr City on 23 November, which took a heavy toll in innocent civilian lives, and the mass abduction of employees and visitors at the Ministry of Higher Education in Baghdad.

Security provides the necessary foundation for a recovering nation's activities, including reconstruction and development. At the same time, political stability in turn leads to improvement in the security situation. Japan reiterates the importance of ownership of the nation-building process by the Iraqi people in establishing responsible governance by the Iraqi Government and national reconstruction. In this regard, Japan appreciates the continued efforts of the Government of Iraq, under the leadership of Prime Minister Al-Maliki, to promote the National Reconciliation Plan and the Security Plan. It is also imperative that the broader international community actively provide the necessary support to assist the efforts made by the Government and the people of Iraq for nation-building.

In this connection, the positive cooperation extended, and the constructive role played, by the neighbouring and regional countries must not be overlooked. We welcome the recently announced normalization of diplomatic relations between Iraq and Syria, as well as the recent visit to Iran by Iraqi President Talabani, following the visit of Prime Minister Al-Maliki to the country in September. We expect that improved relations between Iraq and the neighbouring and regional countries though efforts such as these will lead to political and security stability in Iraq.

At the end of November the Council adopted resolution 1723 (2006), which extended the mandate of the Multinational Force (MNF). Japan welcomes the fact that Iraqi forces are gradually assuming responsibility for security in substantial areas of the country, owing to progress in training the Iraqi security forces by the MNF. Japan expects that the continued presence of the MNF in Iraq will further facilitate this positive development. We pay tribute to the important role that the MNF has been playing in this area.

Japan also wishes to commend once again the important role that United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has been fulfilling in the Iraq process under challenging circumstances, and to express its strong support for the Mission's activities. In the current situation, we continue to place importance on three areas of UNAMI's mandate-based activities, namely: the promotion of national dialogue, the facilitation of coordination and delivery of reconstruction and development assistance, and assistance in the constitutional and electoral processes.

Japan considers the three elements of political stability, improvement of security and economic reconstruction, to be interlinked. From this point of view, we welcome the advancement of the discussion on the International Compact for Iraq. Broader participation of the international community will be key to the success of the Compact process.

We highly appreciate, in this connection, the cooperation by the Governments of the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait in hosting the preparatory meetings in September and October. By the same token, we appreciate the strong role that the United Nations, through UNAMI, has been playing to promote the Compact process as a co-chair. This includes organizing the Foreign Minister-level meeting on Iraq and the meeting to brief on the developments on the Compact, both held in New York in September and November. Japan looks forward to the finalization and adoption of the Compact at the earliest possible time.

The international community must intensify its support for Iraq so that the country can overcome the present difficulties and make meaningful strides towards becoming a democratic and stable State. Japan, for its part, will maintain its commitment to proactively provide appropriate support in Iraq, mainly in the following two areas.

First, Japan provides airlift support activities to UNAMI and the Multinational Force through its Air Self-Defence Force assets. After concluding its humanitarian and reconstruction support activities in Iraq, for which it deployed its Ground Self-Defence Force contingents, Japan began providing regular airlift services to United Nations personnel to facilitate the

ongoing activities of UNAMI and their possible expansion. The Government of Japan made a Cabinet-level decision on 8 December to extend, until the end of July next year, the Basic Plan regarding response measures on the law concerning the special measures on humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Iraq, which is the framework for Japan's cooperation and assistance to the country. We are pleased to report that that decision will enable Japan to continue to provide airlift support.

Secondly, various projects amounting to $1.5 billion in grant aid have been completed to support Iraqi reconstruction. Additional aid of up to $3.5 billion — made available through a soft loan window, largely for improvement of infrastructure and other economic and social projects — is in the pipeline for steady implementation. It is our pleasure to note that Japan announced yesterday, 10 December, its authorization of two oil and electricity projects in utilizing the soft loan, in addition to the six projects previously announced in fields that include seaports, irrigation, thermal power plants, roads and bridges and oil refineries. We hope that implementation of these projects will begin immediately upon the completion of the necessary procedures for financing. Moreover, Japan will remain actively and continuously engaged in the Compact process, in cooperation with the United Nations and other relevant parties.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): At the outset, let me thank the Special Representative Ambassador Qazi for his briefing and for introducing the Secretary-General's report. We also wish to thank Ambassador Jackie Wolcott Sanders of the United States for her briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force.

We have noted that the United Nations, as co-chair of the International Compact for Iraq, continued to provide support to the Government of Iraq in the development of the Compact process, which is an important framework for mobilizing national, regional and international actors in support of the transition in Iraq. We commend the Secretary-General for convening a high-level meeting, which reviewed progress made in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1546 (2004), and also provided an opportunity for the mobilization of greater and broader international support and engagement with the Government of Iraq.

In addition, we welcome the United Nations as co-chair of the first and second International Compact meetings with the Iraq preparatory group in Abu-Dhabi and Kuwait City, respectively, which recognized the need to complete expeditiously the development of the Compact through a broad consultative process at the national, regional and international levels, and progress made in the drafting of the Compact document, in particular, the inclusion of the political and security sections, as well as the presentation of specific bench marks. We acknowledge the Secretary-General's assertion that the success of the Compact would depend on the ability of the Government of Iraq and the international community to deliver on their mutual commitments. We are hopeful that the Compact will be formally launched sooner, rather than later.

We support the continuous efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to engage key political, civil society, tribal and religious leaders with a view to promoting genuine dialogue and addressing the volatile security situation. He should be encouraged to continue with the strengthening of the legal and institutional foundation of the country and assisting in the promotion of the implementation of the Government's National Reconciliation Plan.

We have also noted that the Office of Constitutional Support of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) continued extending its assistance to the Council of Representatives in developing the required legislation for advancing the implementation of the constitution. We note that UNAMI intends to provide strong support to the constitutional review process drawing on best practices from around the world.

We urge the UNAMI Office of Electoral Assistance to continue providing support for the process of the transition from the Independent Electoral Commission to the future Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq and for the planning and updating of the voter rolls in preparation for future electoral events.

My delegation remains concerned about the increase in the number of displaced Iraqis due to violence by various elements. The Secretary-General's report informs us that the total number of displaced persons in Iraq is over 1.6 million, while about an equal number of Iraqis have become refugees outside the country since 2003.

We commend the United Nations agencies and their partners for providing food, shelter and non-food items to as many displaced Iraqis as resources permit, and we add our voice to the Secretary-General's appeal for the international community to identify additional means for supporting United Nations agencies in their work with displaced Iraqis.

Given the environment of insecurity and the consequent high level of human rights violations, the Government of Iraq has obviously not been able to honour its promise to promote the protection of human rights and the rule of law. We are, however, encouraged to note that the UNAMI Human Rights Office continues to work closely with Iraqi institutions to strengthen the rule of law and create a strong and effective national human rights system, and we hope that the draft law on the establishment of a national human rights commission will be enacted soon.

We are deeply worried at the continued violence and numerous deaths occurring daily in Iraq. We hope that the appropriate authorities will leave no stone unturned to improve the general security situation in the country, so as to enable the people of Iraq to achieve lasting peace and security. We therefore look forward to the deliberations of the national reconciliation conference to be held on 16 December and to its promulgation of a national hydrocarbon law. We also welcome the decision of the Iraqi Government to send envoys east and west to enlist their support in the quest for peace, because we agree with the observation made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General that an exclusionary approach, whether internal or external, will not result in progress towards peace and stability.

Finally, the deteriorating security situation in Iraq has put severe constraints on the ability of the United Nations to carry out its activities, and its staff continues to be exposed to considerable risks. We hope for an improvement in the security situation that will lessen the risks to which United Nations personnel are exposed, so that the viability of maintaining a significant United Nations presence in Iraq will not be called into question. Indeed, the effective and commendable role being played by UNAMI in developing Iraqi national institutions and in providing for persons in distress may require it to assume greater responsibilities in the collective quest for a united and peaceful Iraq.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I, too, would like to thank the Special Representative, Ambassador Qazi, for his statement, as well as Ambassador Sanders for her statement on behalf of the Multinational Force.

While the political process in Iraq since 2003 in many ways has been successful, the current situation in Iraq presents a very significant challenge to the international community. As described in the Secretary-General's report, over the last three months the situation in Iraq has further deteriorated in many parts of the country, with a significant rise in sectarian violence, insurgent and terrorist attacks, as well as criminal activities, which are now at an all-time high.

Unfortunately, in this difficult environment the Iraqi Government's efforts to foster national reconciliation, stem the violence and accelerate Iraq's economic development have not met with sufficient success.

We remain deeply concerned about the violence perpetrated by the insurgents. The number of human rights violations continues to rise in Iraq in spite of the Government's resolve to promote the protection of human rights and the rule of law. As noted by the Secretary-General, in large areas of Baghdad and in other parts of the country, insurgent and militia activities remain uncontrolled. The number of internally displaced Iraqis is growing and is now estimated at about 450,000. Moreover, reports of mistreatment of detainees at the hands of the Iraqi police and security forces continue. We urge the Iraqi Government to do more to ensure the protection of the rights of all Iraqis. The new Iraq must do better than the old Iraq.

In his observations, the Secretary-General points to the importance of ensuring a fully inclusive political process focused on reaching out to all communities, as well as sharing the country's resources, with a view to the broader national interest. Secondly, the Government must establish a monopoly on the use of force and address the violence in its many forms, including dealing with the militias. Thirdly, there is a growing need for a regional environment supportive of Iraq's transition.

The international community must thus continue its commitment to support Iraq at this critical time. This needs to be done in a variety of ways. In particular, regional and international backing can help

make the Iraq Compact a success and provide the people of Iraq with a fresh start.

At the request of the Iraqi Government, resolution 1723 (2006), adopted on 28 November, renews the mandate of the Multinational Force until the end of 2007. The mandate may be terminated at any time if the Iraqi Government so wishes. The continued presence of the Force is a clear expression of the commitment of the international community to support the Iraqi people.

As underlined by the Prime Minister in his letter to the Security Council dated 11 November, security and stability are the responsibility of the Iraqi Government, and the Iraqi security forces will increasingly play a greater role. The members of the Multinational Force have long supported the training of the Iraqi security forces, and those efforts are expected to continue.

We are pleased to see the increasing capabilities among the Iraqi security forces, which made transfer of security responsibility in Al Muthanna and Dhi Qar possible this year. We hope that, with stronger and more confident national forces and with the continued support of the Multinational Force, the level of violence will decrease and the main focus will be on the reconstruction of Iraq.

In addition, international support for Iraq's reconstruction in the form of financial assistance and contributions to capacity-building must continue and be sustained.

As mentioned, the launch of the Iraq Compact this summer marks a new departure for international support for the realization of the Iraqi Government's plans for a united, federal and democratic society at peace with its neighbours. Denmark stands ready to contribute to that process.

Denmark intends to maintain its presence in Iraq as long as its support is requested by the Iraqi Government and the United Nations and as long as it believes its presence is meaningful. This spring the Danish Parliament decided to extend the mandate of the Danish troops in Iraq until the end of June 2007. Denmark's involvement in Iraq also comprises reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. To date we have committed approximately $90 million.

As I mentioned earlier, Denmark supports an expansion of the role of the United Nations in Iraq. Denmark continues to directly support the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Denmark's decision to comply with a UNAMI request to deploy a C-130 aircraft suitable both for passengers and cargo will be effective shortly.

Iraq stands at a crossroads. The international community must remain committed to supporting the Government's efforts to promote national reconciliation and to improve the critical security situation. The extension of the mandate of the Multinational Force for another year, as well as support for the Iraq Compact, form part of the support that is vital to the development of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Iraq.

Mr. Matulay (Slovakia): At the outset, I should like to join previous speakers in thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Qazi, for his briefing and for introducing the current report, as well as for his valuable remarks and observations. I wish to take this opportunity to commend him in person as well as all United Nations and United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) staff involved for the outstanding work they are doing in and for Iraq under very difficult circumstances. I wish also to thank Ambassador Sanders for her report on behalf of the countries that make up the Multinational Force, which include my own country, Slovakia.

As we heard during the briefing, the situation in Iraq remains extremely fragile and complex, requiring our thorough attention and our unconditional support and assistance. That is crucial, especially at this critical time when conditions in Iraq have further deteriorated. A huge task lies ahead of us in order to reverse this process, a task in which the Government and institutions of Iraq need to play a central role.

During the past three years, the people and the leaders of Iraq have clearly demonstrated their commitment and support to Iraq's political transition and have made many sacrifices to achieve that goal. Achievements made to date should not be forgotten or overlooked. We consider the overall improvement of security and the promotion of national reconciliation, human rights and economic welfare to be the leading priorities for the Government of Iraq. Those priorities have to be implemented, mainly through a consensus-based action plan that will address the basic needs,

concerns and aspirations of all of Iraq's communities and constituencies.

In order to achieve progress and success, new and revised approaches are needed. As the Secretary-General suggests in his report, developing a fully inclusive political process, establishing a monopoly over the use of force and cultivating a regional environment supportive of Iraq's transition represent a viable strategy to reverse current political and security trends in the country. In this vein, we remain convinced that a constitutional review process and a review of the de-Baathification process represent important confidence-building measures that can help Iraq tackle its many challenges.

In our view, the strong involvement of the United Nations in Iraq's transition and stabilization process remains instrumental. We, therefore, welcome and support the International Compact with Iraq; the United Nations is strongly engaged and is playing a leading role in developing it. Such an arrangement can provide a tangible long-term framework for the reconstruction and development of Iraq. We also note with satisfaction the recent positive experience with respect to the Compact, in which actors at the national, regional and international levels have been engaged. This is proof of the existence of political will to promote Iraq's transition and stabilization. This political will should be further enhanced and effectively mobilized in fostering dialogue and understanding on all three levels — notably, the regional one.

Contributing to and promoting durable peace and stability in Iraq will benefit not only that country, but also its immediate neighbours, as well as the wider region. In this regard, we feel that Iraq's immediate neighbours in particular could and should play a more active role in promoting that country's peace and stability. We regard their contribution to the success of Iraq's stabilization as instrumental and decisive. Hence, we hope that Iraq will receive the required assistance and support from its neighbours.

Regrettably, the level of violence and insecurity continues to rise in many areas of Iraq, and the mounting civilian casualties remain a source of constant concern. Similarly, we remain deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Iraq. The effects of the ongoing insurgency, sectarian violence, revenge attacks and militia activities are alarming. We feel that firm measures are needed to reinforce the justice and security systems and to develop a robust human rights agenda in order not only to protect the lives of innocent civilians but also to hold those responsible for violent acts fully accountable.

We urge the Government of Iraq to take concrete measures to end the environment of lawlessness, impunity and insecurity and to prevent the possibility of a humanitarian and human rights catastrophe in that country. We welcome the decision of the Ministry of Interior to intensify the screening of police and thus to help combat the impunity of the Iraqi security forces and increase public confidence in them. We also welcome the draft law on the establishment of a national human rights commission and stress the urgent need to pass this law in the Council of Representatives.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that Slovakia remains committed to the political and economic transition of Iraq. We are one of the troop-contributing countries to the Multinational Force. Slovakia has also participated in a NATO training mission and has organized training for Iraqi military police staff on its soil. We stand ready to assist Iraq through financial and material ways and means as well.

Mr. Biabaroh-Iboro (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his report (S/2006/945) on the situation in Iraq, as well as Mr. Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his oral briefing today. We would also like to thank the representative of the United States for her presentation on the activities of the Multinational Force.

The situation in Iraq, which is strongly characterized by recurring, unabated and varied violence, is of constant concern to my delegation, and requires that innovative solutions be found. The international community, and the United Nations in particular, cannot stand idly by while the situation in Iraq disintegrates, as described in the report of the Secretary-General. Iraq deserves more than the hideous daily suffering of its people living through a virtual civil war.

In spite of all the efforts made on security and national reconciliation by various players, including the Iraqi Government, and the role played by the international community through the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Multinational Force, the level of violence is not abating to any

significant extent. Indeed, the situation is deteriorating day by day, placing Iraq at the top of the list of places where daily life is becoming impossible and where violations of essential human rights are being trivialized to an extreme. This is reflected in the number of Iraqis choosing to go into exile, in the many dead and wounded both among civilians and among Iraqi and international armed forces.

These many challenges call for a new strategy, which must be taken up by the Government of Iraq. Above all, there must be trust in the Government among the population, which is beset by political and religious divisions. There is thus need for an inclusive political approach in which all Iraqi communities will share in the political power, participate in State institutions and share in the distribution of natural resources. In this regard, the possibility of constitutional review should help lead to stability.

It is also necessary that the Iraqi Government be able to establish a monopoly over the use of force throughout the entire national territory, putting an end to the activities of the militias, which feed on and perpetuate the prevailing instability and violence, and the terrorist groups associated with Al-Qaida and other gangs.

Finally, the Iraqi Government must contribute to creating a regional environment conducive to improving relations with its neighbours. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the meetings of high-ranking Iraqi leaders with their counterparts in the region, in particular those of Iran. Similarly, we welcome with interest the announcement regarding an international conference on Iraq. Peace and reconstruction depend on it. My delegation is equally open to the various proposals put forward and to initiatives aimed at stabilizing the political and security situation in Iraq. These are a prelude to the reconstruction and development of this country, which has been harmed by many decades of war and fratricidal struggle.

In conclusion, we would urge the international community, in particular the key donors, to help Iraq in the effective implementation of the International Compact with Iraq. We hail the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Multinational Force.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Qatar.

At the outset, I would like to join all my colleagues in warmly thanking Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and Ambassador Wolcott Sanders for their respective briefings to the Council.

This year, the situation in Iraq has been marked by heightened violence and an unprecedented deterioration in the security situation. Recently, the number of victims that have fallen to this violence has reached a hundred a day, a most alarming number. This makes the Iraqi crisis one of the gravest security crises in the world. Whatever name we give to the conflict, there can be no doubt that the security situation in Iraq is critical, not only because of the growing number of victims of violence, but also because of the diverse nature of the violence — terrorist, criminal or ethnic-based — with one form more dangerous than the last. We will nevertheless need to make every effort and explore every avenue to put an end to violence and restore stability and harmony in Iraq.

Qatar continues to reaffirm the need to respect Iraq's territorial integrity and sovereignty, so that the Iraqi people can recover its liberty and security. In order to ensure that, we must pool national, international and regional efforts to implement that priority. The neighbouring countries can play a major role in that regard by helping to stabilize Iraq. Like the international community and the United Nations, they should contribute to setting Iraq on the path towards stabilization and reconstruction.

In that framework, we stress the importance and usefulness of the International Compact with Iraq. Effecting an immediate improvement in the basic living conditions of the Iraqi people and addressing the alarming humanitarian situation are just as important as national reconciliation and strengthening the security forces to ensure Iraq's stability. Beyond the need for a participatory, transparent and inclusive political process that would meet the aspirations of all sectors of Iraqi society, efforts must be pursued to control the deteriorating security situation, so that Iraq's own security forces can maintain security in their own country, a task now essentially assumed by the Multinational Force. That goal is severely hampered by the grave current situation in Iraq, which is a serious obstacle to the efforts of UNAMI in reconstruction, development and the protection of human rights and the rule of law. We cannot leave Iraq to deal with this crisis on its own.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting. Allow me also to convey my thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ashraf Qazi, for his statement earlier in the meeting.

We also thank Ambassador Jackie Sanders for her statement on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq. I am likewise grateful to the members of the Council for their statements.

The Secretary-General's report before us provides as usual an overview of the major developments in Iraq in the international and regional contexts over the past three months. It also covers the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in providing assistance in various fields under the mandate established by Security Council resolution 1546 (2004). In that regard, I would express the appreciation of the Government and people of Iraq to Mr. Qazi and UNAMI for their efforts. We are also grateful to the United Nations agencies, programmes and funds for their assistance, in particular in providing basic social services. We continue to look forward to UNAMI's playing an important and vital role in the coming phase, in particular in the development of electoral institutions and the constitutional review process, in a manner that will strengthen national reconciliation and dialogue. That will, of course, require a larger United Nations presence in Iraq in the near future.

As the Secretary-General's report indicates, Iraq has recently witnessed an increase in acts of violence, terrorism and sectarian bloodshed, in addition to abductions and kidnappings. The situation has prompted those within and outside the United Nations who are concerned about the situation in Iraq to issue serious warnings of a potentially dangerous deterioration of the situation to the very brink of civil war. In that regard, the Government of Iraq is fully aware of who is carrying out those acts and of their objectives. My delegation has addressed this issue repeatedly before the Security Council. Those who carry out such attacks are Saddam loyalists, the Takfiri (charge of unbelief) extremists and criminal gangs. Their ultimate goals may differ, but they share the immediate objective of undermining the entire political process. The Government will deal very forcefully and decisively with that challenge. The political process in Iraq is the fruit of a democratic exercise in the context of which the legislative elections and constitutional referendum were held within the time frame set out in Security Council resolution 1546 (2004). Thus, to defend the political process in Iraq is to defend international legitimacy and the will of the international community.

We reiterate our previous statements to the Council to the effect that the Iraqi people, which has succeeded over the past three years in completing the political and constitutional processes, will also emerge victorious in its battle for national dialogue and reconciliation, the defeat of the terrorists and the preservation of its unity and territorial integrity.

One of the principal factors of success in combating the cycle of violence, terrorism and crime is the broadening of participation in our political process, which seeks to guarantee the active involvement of all political parties and communities in Iraq. To that end, on 25 June 2006, the Iraqi Government adopted a national programme based on national dialogue and reconciliation. The programme is built around a national vision that political consensus is the only way to halt the deterioration of the security environment. That vision was reaffirmed by Iraq's National Security Council at its meeting of 23 and 24 November and by the Prime Minister on 26 November, when he said that

> "sectarian violence will stop only when the politicians agree and understand that there are no winners and no losers in this battle".

In order to strengthen the national reconciliation initiative, the Prime Minister said on 5 December that

> "we intend to convene a national conference of political actors in the near future, to include various Iraqi political organizations, parties and individuals participating in the political process, in order to strengthen national unity and agree on a national charter that will proscribe sectarian strife and create opportunities for cooperation among the various components of the Iraqi people".

Any appeal for an international or regional conference with similar ambitions will be welcomed by the people of Iraq. The Government of Iraq will seek to ensure its success. However, if the purpose of calling for such a meeting is to circumvent the democratic gains made by the Iraqi people and to take the political process back to square one, that will be unacceptable, not only because it will dash the wishes and hopes of the Iraqi people, but also because it runs counter to the resolutions of international legality and the will of the international community.

Parallel to the process of national reconciliation, the Government of Iraq is working to increase its security capacity in order to impose State authority and enforce the law. Likewise, the Government of Iraq is working with the Multinational Force to complete the gradual transfer of responsibility for security to Iraqi forces as soon as possible.

On that basis, and given the Government of Iraq's awareness of the need for the presence of the Multinational Force until Iraqi security forces are able to shoulder responsibility for security, in a letter to the President of the Security Council dated 11 November 2006 (S/2006/888, annex), Iraq's Prime Minister requested an extension of the mandate of the Multinational Force for an additional year, until 31 December 2007 — or until an earlier date should the Iraqi Government so request. The Prime Minister also underscored in his letter the question of transferring responsibility for security to the competent Iraqi authorities, especially as this relates to the Government of Iraq's responsibility for the recruitment, training, equipping and arming of its security forces and for command and control of Iraqi forces and responsibility for the security situation.

With regard to the situation of human rights in Iraq, it cannot be viewed in isolation from the deteriorating security situation. Those rights are daily being violated as a result of the actions of terrorists, violence-mongers and criminal gangs. Clearly, the more the security situation improves, the better the chances for protecting human rights. The Government of Iraq is serious about addressing the situation, both by confronting terrorists and criminal gangs and through the work of Government bodies responsible for justice, law enforcement and prosecuting those who perpetrate human rights violations. But collateral human rights violations resulting from confrontations between Iraqi security forces and terrorists and criminal gangs cannot be put on the same level as deliberate violations of human rights, foremost among which is the right to life, that are perpetrated by terrorist elements and criminal gangs on a daily basis in schools, universities, marketplaces and houses of worship. Such acts take the lives of hundreds of innocent people, including women and children. The difference between the two situations is enormous. We should therefore not confuse matters, so as to retain a sense of reality and truth.

The challenges confronting Iraq are great, and not only in the areas of improving the security situation and addressing the spiral of violence, terrorism and crime. There are also challenges in the areas of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Without the assistance of the international community, Iraq will be unable to rebuild the infrastructure needed to launch the development of its economy by using its human and natural resources to build a prosperous future. This brings to the fore the importance of the International Compact with Iraq, an initiative launched by the Iraqi Government and based on a mutual commitment between Iraq and the international community that aims at establishing a partnership based on a national vision aimed at fulfilling the Iraqi people's aspirations to put in place a democratic federal State and to build a prosperous economy through which Iraq can play its full role as an effective member of the international community.

Once again, we would like to express our gratitude to the United Nations for its efforts in that regard, as a co-chair of the International Compact with the Government of Iraq. Along with the Secretary-General, we look forward to the formal launch of the International Compact with Iraq, whose date and venue are under consideration.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Qazi to respond to comments and questions raised by members of the Council.

Mr. Qazi: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Security Council for affording me this opportunity to present the report of the Secretary-General, along with my comments, and to listen to each member's words of wisdom and support. We have taken serious note of them. These comments will be of enormous help to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) as it goes about fulfilling its mandate in the next phase of the situation in Iraq.

As has been noted, Iraq has been going through a very critical period. What is most critical about it is the level of violence, which is making it difficult for the

initiatives that have been announced, launched and, indeed, implemented, to achieve success and the goals they have set for themselves. Therefore, one of the very first priorities must be to find a way to reduce the debilitating level of violence, which has resulted in a human cost that is among the very worst to be found in the world.

I would like in particular to thank the Government of Iraq for all its support for the UNAMI mission, without which we could not have possibly operated in Iraq. I would also like to thank the Multinational Force-Iraq for all the support they have provided us. I take note of the fact that a lot is expected from UNAMI in promoting national dialogue and helping the International Compact to move forward towards the achievement of its objectives. We shall certainly do that to the best of our abilities.

There was a comment about the need for us to have sufficient staff in order to fulfil all those obligations to Iraq. In that connection, I might just mention that, while we are gratified to note the appreciation and the call for an even more active role by UNAMI, we have to take into account the security situation, which has not been improving. Indeed, it has been deteriorating. Currently the number of our people in Iraq has actually decreased, rather than increased. We hope the security environment will improve to allow us to put an end to the decrease in our personnel — because we have to put the security of our personnel above all considerations. If we work together collectively in support of the efforts of the Government of Iraq, I am sure that those efforts will result in reversing the deteriorating trend in the security situation, enabling UNAMI to deploy the number of people necessary in Iraq itself to assist the Government of Iraq in the achievement of its objectives. When our people are relocated, they are not relocated out of UNAMI; they are relocated in the vicinity, in particular in Amman and in Kuwait. Thus, we are always there, and will be there, to assist the Government and the people of Iraq. But, because of the security situation, at times it is not possible to have the numbers that we would like to have.

With those words, once again, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and all the other members of the Security Council, as well as the Government of Iraq and Ambassador Al Bayati for his kind words of encouragement.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Qazi for the clarifications he has just provided.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to inform the members of the Council that the Council will hold consultations of the whole on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, directly following the adjournment of this morning's meeting on the situation concerning Iraq.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5584th meeting

Tuesday, 12 December 2006, 10.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani	(Qatar)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Russian Federation	Mr. Saltanov
	Slovakia	Ms. Štrofová
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Iddi
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East (S/2006/956)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-65360 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East (S/2006/956)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Israel in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Carmon (Israel) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 11 December 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/960 and which reads as follows.

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the open thematic debate of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East to be held on Tuesday, 12 December 2006."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the Council's provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/956, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East.

I invite the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, to take the floor.

The Secretary-General: Let me start, Mr. President, by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to present my report on the Middle East (S/2006/956). We are happy to see you here, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

As I told the General Assembly in September, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not just one regional conflict among many. No other conflict carries such a powerful symbolic and emotional charge, even for people far away. Yet, while the quest for peace has registered some important achievements over the years, a final settlement has defied the best efforts of several generations of world leaders. I, too, will leave office without an end to the prolonged agony.

The Middle East today faces grim prospects. The region is in profound crisis. The situation is more complex, more fragile and more dangerous than it has been for a very long time.

It was with this in mind that I took the initiative of preparing the report that is now in the Council's hands. My aim is to help us get out of the present morass and back to a viable peace process that will respond to the region's yearning for peace.

Mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians has reached new heights. The Gaza Strip has become a cauldron of deepening poverty and frustration, despite the withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlements last year. In the West Bank, too, the situation is dire. Settlement activity and construction of the barrier continue. Israeli obstacles impede Palestinian movement throughout the area. The Palestinian Authority, paralysed by a debilitating political and financial crisis, is no longer able to provide security or basic services.

Israelis, for their part, continue to live in fear of terrorism. They are dismayed by the inadequacy of Palestinian efforts to halt rocket attacks into southern

Israel. And they are alarmed by a Hamas-led Government which is, at best, ambivalent about the two-State solution and, at worst, refuses to renounce violence and rejects the basic tenets of the approach to the conflict consistently favoured by a majority of Palestinians and enshrined in the Oslo Accords.

In Lebanon, the country's political transformation is incomplete, and its leaders face a campaign of intimidation and destabilization. As last summer's fighting between Israel and Hizbollah showed, Lebanon remains a hostage to its own difficult history and captive of forces from within and from beyond its borders that wish to exploit its vulnerability.

Casting our glance to other parts of the region, we see the Syrian Golan Heights still under Israeli control and concerns about Syria's relations with militant groups beyond its borders. Iraq is mired in unrelenting violence. Iran's nuclear activities and possible ambitions have emerged as a source of deep concern to many in the region, and beyond it as well. All of this feeds, and is fed by, an alarming rise in extremism.

Each of these conflicts has its own dynamics and causes. Each will require its own specific solution and its own process to produce a solution that will endure. In each case, it is the parties involved who bear the primary responsibility for peace. No one can make peace for them; no peace can be imposed on them. No one should want peace more than they do.

At the same time, the international community cannot escape its own responsibility to use its influence. The various conflicts and crises in the region have become ever more intertwined. Though deeply separate and distinct, the various arenas affect and shape each other, making conflict resolution and crisis management more difficult. The international community must develop a new understanding of the uncertainty engulfing the Middle East and then shoulder its full responsibility in resolving it and stabilizing the region.

I would therefore like to offer a few thoughts on what the parties themselves and outsiders — from the Quartet to this Council and other United Nations bodies — might do differently in search for peace, in particular peace between Israelis and Palestinians, which, while no panacea, will go a long way toward defusing tensions throughout the region.

One of the most frustrating aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the apparent inability of many people on both sides to understand the position of the other and the unwillingness of some even to try. As a true friend and supporter of both sides, I would like to address frank messages to each.

It is completely right and understandable that Israel and its supporters should seek to ensure its security by persuading Palestinians, and Arabs and Muslims more broadly, to alter their attitude and behaviour toward Israel. But they are not likely to succeed unless they themselves grasp and acknowledge the fundamental Palestinian grievance, namely, that the establishment of the State of Israel involved the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families, turning them into refugees, and was followed 19 years later by a military occupation that brought hundreds of thousands more Palestinians under Israeli rule.

Israel is justifiably proud of its democracy and its efforts to build a society based on respect for the rule of law. But Israel's democracy can thrive only if the occupation over another people ends. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon acknowledged as much. Israel has undergone a major cultural shift since the days of Oslo — all of Israel's major political parties now acknowledge that Israel needs to end the occupation, for its own sake and for the sake of its own security.

Yet thousands of Israelis still live in territories occupied in 1967, and over a thousand more are added every month. As Palestinians watch this activity, they also see a barrier being built through their land, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. as well as more than 500 checkpoints to control their movement, and the heavy presence of the Israel Defense Forces. Their despair at the occupation only grows, as does their determination to resist it. As a result, some tend to invest much of their trust in those who pursue the armed struggle rather than a peace process that does not seem to yield the coveted goal of an independent State.

I agree with Israel and its supporters that there is a difference — moral as well as legal — between terrorists who deliberately target civilians, and regular soldiers who, in the course of military operations, unintentionally kill or wound civilians despite efforts to avoid such casualties. But the larger the number of civilian casualties during these operations, and the

more perfunctory the precautions taken to avoid such losses, the more this difference is diminished. The use of military force in densely populated civilian areas is a blunt instrument that only produces more death, destruction, recrimination and vengeance. And, as we have seen, it does little to achieve the desired goal of stopping terrorist attacks.

Israelis may reply that they are merely protecting themselves from terrorism, which they have every right to do. But that argument will carry less weight so long as the occupation in the West Bank becomes more burdensome and the settlement expansion continues. Israel would receive more understanding if its actions were clearly designed to help end an occupation, rather than to entrench it.

We should all work with Israel to move beyond the unhappy status quo and reach a negotiated end to the occupation based on the principle of land for peace.

It is completely right and understandable to support the Palestinian people, who have suffered so much. But Palestinians and their supporters will never be truly effective if they focus solely on Israel's transgressions, without conceding any justice or legitimacy to Israel's own concerns, and without being willing to admit that Israel's opponents have themselves committed appalling and inexcusable crimes. No resistance to occupation can justify terrorism. We should all be united in our unequivocal rejection of terror as a political instrument.

I also believe that the actions of some United Nations bodies may themselves be counterproductive. The Human Rights Council, for example, has already held three special sessions focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict. I hope that the Council will take care to handle the issue in an impartial way, and not allow it to monopolize attention at the expense of other situations where there are no less grave violations, or even worse ones.

In the same vein, those who complain that the Security Council is guilty of a double standard — applying sanctions to Arab and Muslim Governments, but not to Israel — should take care that they themselves do not apply double standards in the other direction, by holding Israel to a standard of behaviour that they are unwilling to apply to other States, to Israel's adversaries or, indeed, to themselves.

Some may feel satisfaction at repeatedly passing General Assembly resolutions or holding conferences that condemn Israel's behaviour. But one should also ask whether such steps bring any tangible relief or benefit to the Palestinians. There have been decades of resolutions. There has been a proliferation of special committees, sessions and Secretariat divisions and units. Has any of that had an effect on Israel's policies, other than to strengthen the belief in Israel and among many of its supporters that this great Organization is too one-sided to be allowed a significant role in the Middle East peace process?

Even worse, some of the rhetoric used in connection with the issue implies a refusal to concede the very legitimacy of Israel's existence, let alone the validity of its security concerns. We must never forget that Jews have very good historical reasons for taking seriously any threat to Israel's existence. What was done to Jews and others by the Nazis remains an undeniable tragedy, unique in human history. Today, Israelis are often confronted with words and actions that seem to confirm their fear that the goal of their adversaries is to extinguish their existence as a State and as a people.

Therefore, those who want to be heard on Palestine should not deny or minimize that history or the connection that many Jews feel with their historic homeland. Rather, they should acknowledge Israel's security concerns and make clear that their criticism is rooted not in hatred or intolerance, but in a desire for justice, self-determination and peaceful coexistence.

Perhaps the greatest irony in this sad story is that there is no serious question about the broad outline of a final settlement. The parties themselves, at various times and through various diplomatic channels, have come close to bridging almost all of the gaps between them. There is every reason for the parties to try again, with principled, concerted help from the international community. We need a new and urgent push for peace.

The road will be long, and much trust will have to be rebuilt along the way. But let us remember where this effort needs to take us: two States, Israel and Palestine, within secure, recognized and negotiated boundaries based on those of 4 June 1967; a broader peace encompassing Israel's other neighbours, namely, Lebanon and Syria; normal diplomatic and economic relations; arrangements that would allow both Israel and Palestine to establish their internationally

recognized capitals in Jerusalem and would ensure access for people of all faiths to their holy places; a solution that respects the rights of Palestinian refugees and is consistent with the two-State solution and with the character of the States in the region.

Reaching that destination is not as impossible as some might imagine. Most Israelis genuinely believe in peace with the Palestinians — perhaps not quite as the Palestinians envision it, but genuine nevertheless. Most Palestinians do not seek the destruction of Israel, only the end of occupation and their own State — perhaps in a slightly larger territory than Israelis would wish to concede, but a limited territory nevertheless.

Our challenge is to convince the people on each side that these majorities exist on the other side, while showing that spoilers and rejectionists are a distinct minority.

I believe that the fundamental aspirations of both peoples can be reconciled. I believe in the right of Israel to exist, and to exist in full and permanent security — free from terrorism, free from attack, free from even the threat of attack. I believe in the right of the Palestinians to exercise their self-determination. They have been miserably abused and exploited, by Israel, by the Arab world, sometimes by their own leaders and perhaps even, at times, by the international community. They deserve to see fulfilled their simple ambition to live in freedom and dignity.

The Road Map, endorsed by the Council in its resolution 1515 (2003), is still the reference point around which any effort to re-energize a political effort should be concentrated. Its sponsor, the Quartet, retains its validity because of its singular combination of legitimacy, political strength and financial and economic clout. But the Quartet needs to do more to restore faith not only in its own seriousness and effectiveness, but also in the Road Map's practicability, and to create the conditions for resuming a viable peace process. It needs to find a way to institutionalize its consultations with the relevant regional partners. It needs to engage the parties directly in its deliberations. The time has come for the Quartet to be clearer at the outset on the parameters of an endgame deal. And it will have to be open to new ideas and initiatives.

Tensions in the region are near the breaking point, I need not tell you, Mr. President. Extremism and populism are leaving less political space for moderates, including those States that have reached peace agreements with Israel. Welcome moves towards democracy, such as elections, have simultaneously posed a quandary in bringing to power parties, individuals and movements that oppose the basis of current peacemaking approaches. The opportunity for negotiating a two-State solution will last for only so long. Should we fail to seize it, the people who most directly bear the brunt of this calamity will be consigned to new depths of suffering and grief. Other conflicts and problems will become that much harder to resolve, and extremists the world over will enjoy a boost to their recruiting efforts.

The period ahead could well prove crucial. Every day brings defeats in the struggle for peace and reasons to give up. But we must not succumb to frustration. The principles on which peace must be based are known to all of us. Even the contours of what a solution would look like on the ground are well mapped out. I believe that we can break the current stalemate and make new strides towards peace.

The United Nations and the Middle East are closely intertwined. The region has shaped this Organization like no other. The situation, the people and the thirst for peace are all very close to my heart. I know that they are close to yours as well. As a matter of urgency, let us match that concern with concerted action.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his clear and straightforward statement.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign of the State of Qatar.

I should like to begin by thanking all present for having accepted our invitation to participate in this open debate to discuss the question of peace in the Middle East. That issue is at the top of the Organization's list of priorities in the field of international peace and security. I would be remiss if I failed to welcome the Secretary-General and to thank him for his tireless efforts devoted to this cause, which he considers to be one of his most important priorities.

The United Nations has been seized of the dilemma of the Middle East conflict since the establishment of the Organization. Its engagement in this crisis, in all its aspects, has been manifested in efforts that have been effective at times and have stagnated at others, depending on the intensity of the

situation at any given moment and on the degree of concern and attention shown by the international community. It is no secret that the crisis has had grave consequences for the region and for the world. Its repercussions will continue to be felt as long as it eludes a peaceful, just and comprehensive solution that guarantees the rights and spells out the obligations of all the concerned parties.

When, following the Madrid Conference, the international community decided to assume responsibility for the establishment of a just, permanent and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, the people of the region felt that this augured well for their future. A sense of optimism prevailed, because a long-sought-after objective was finally within reach. Fifteen years after the Madrid Conference, optimism has dissipated, hopes for peace have been shattered and frustration and despair prevail. Destruction is rampant. Many innocent Arabs and Israelis continue to fall victim to acts of violence and counter-violence. Added to this list are acts of terror whose effects are felt far beyond the region — acts that constitute a serious challenge to the international community. All of this is the result of our failure to arrive at a just and comprehensive peace.

As the Council embarks on a discussion of this fundamental issue of international peace and security, we must not forget a number of basic points. The conflict has lasted for over half a century. Failure to arrive at acceptable solutions to this question over the years has led to catastrophic consequences for the overall situation in the region. The repercussions have been felt throughout the international community. While the reasons for failure are well known, just and equitable solutions need not remain elusive. All it takes is good intentions and commitment to the tenets of international legitimacy.

Israel is not the only side that is legitimately entitled to live in peace and security in the region. Palestinians and Arabs have exactly the same right. Generally speaking, the Arab side has for some time been consistently confirming, through both its positions and its actions, that it earnestly desires and seeks a just and comprehensive peace.

We must understand that the basic political, security and development problems of the region cannot be resolved without an honourable and peaceful resolution of the question under discussion. History has shown that a military solution to the problem is impossible. It also shows that the civilized humanitarian course of action that we are collectively advocating dictates that we renounce extremism and avoid rigid positions and unilateral solutions that seek to guarantee the rights of one side and stamp out those of the others.

We have more international resolutions, projects, plans and positions than we can possibly use. We must acknowledge that fact. What we lack is the political will to achieve the common objectives that will serve the interest of all parties to live in peace, security and stability and promote coexistence and constructive cooperation.

At this stage, the Arab-Israeli conflict can no longer be resolved through partial solutions. Not only have these been shown to be futile, but they have also failed to bring about a permanent settlement. We need to pursue a coordinated, integrated and consistent approach to resolve the conflict, build peace and achieve reconciliation. The approach must be comprehensive and open to participation by all parties, must reflect the needs and interests of the parties concerned and must protect fundamental rights and humanitarian principles. It should stamp out violence and attend to the social and psychological aspects of the conflict, with a view to arriving at sustainable peace and stability. We are all called upon to confront parties on both sides that refuse to work towards peace.

I would like to recall that Israel has repeatedly stated that it needs a partner in the peace process. But who will determine the criteria for an acceptable partner?

The efforts that the State of Qatar is making to bring about sustainable peace in the Middle East are not simply an item under discussion in the Security Council. They constitute a part of the policy that we are pursuing with a view to arriving at a peaceful, comprehensive and just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The longer the conflict continues, the worse the consequences will be for our peace and stability. We are part of the region; we both influence and are influenced by developments in it.

The United Nations is responsible for the achievement of sustainable peace in the Middle East, as the first purpose of the Organization is to maintain international peace and security. Maintaining international peace and security, undertaking effective

collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to international peace and security and upholding the principles of justice and international law are among the primary objectives of the Organization.

While the Security Council is the organ that has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, it is incumbent upon all Member States to seek to resolve international disputes peacefully, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

It is regrettable that the Council deals with issues of lesser gravity and importance with unwavering seriousness and resolve, but fails to accord the dangerous question of the Middle East, which poses an ominous threat to the region as a whole, the same degree of significance. We are all aware of the critical and alarming circumstances in the region. The Council should therefore accord greater attention to this question in order to revive the peace process. It must play an active role with a view to arriving at a comprehensive, just and permanent solution to the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict. When the Council is seized of other ongoing conflicts around the world, that is the course it pursues.

We strongly believe that the dividends of peace will not only benefit the parties concerned and the immediate region but will also extend to the world at large, particularly to influential actors, to whom we appeal today to earnestly strive for peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council. I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to thank the Secretary-General for his presence here with us, for his report and for the briefing he has just given us. His extensive report includes a number of ideas and proposals, which, if taken into account, will represent an effective means of ending the present stalemate in the Middle East political process and resolving the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

On behalf of the Palestinian people, its leadership and of our President, I wish to pay tribute to the Secretary-General and to thank him most warmly for all of his efforts aimed at arriving at a just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East, in particular his support for the Palestinian cause. The Secretary-General has always been a great friend to Palestine and to peace in the Middle East. We wish him much happiness and success in his new life, after 31 December.

Allow me at the outset, Sir, to extend to you our warm congratulations on your country's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are fully confident that under your presidency, thanks to your skills and your wisdom, the work of the Council will be carried out successfully. I wish also to pay tribute to the Ambassador of Peru, who showed great wisdom in conducting the work of the Council last month.

I should like also to express our warmest thanks to the delegation of Qatar for its excellent initiative to convene this important ministerial-level meeting on the question of sustainable peace in the Middle East. This meeting is an extension of the ministerial meeting of the Security Council held on 21 September 2006 on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. We have great faith in the Council's role of promoting international relations, safeguarding peace and security and promoting international law.

The components of peace in the Middle East are quite clear and precise and are reflected in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab Summit at Beirut in 2002, the Road Map set out by the Quartet and endorsed by this body, and the principle of land for peace. Yet the main problem remains the lack of political will on the part of the international community and the absence of any serious and tangible measures and actions, which are essential for the effective implementation of those resolutions and initiatives through practical and specific mechanisms.

Given the longstanding paralysis of the peace process, the Arab Foreign Ministers met in the Security Council last September in an attempt to break the impasse and to revitalize the peace process. In the wake of the war in Gaza and in Lebanon last summer, and following the deterioration of the situation in more than one area of the Middle East, which further endangered international peace and security, we insisted that action be taken in tandem with the Arab response, in particular by Europe. We therefore welcome the European efforts aimed at breaking the

impasse and relaunching the peace process through practical and specific mechanisms.

We would also underscore the promising nature of the Baker-Hamilton report. The report contains recommendations that can be used as a prelude to resuming the political and peace processes. We would also stress the importance of statements made by the Israeli authorities expressing their readiness seriously to consider the Arab Peace Initiative as an appropriate platform for negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the one hand and, on the other, other Arab parties whose territory has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

We have repeatedly stated that the absence of a solution to the question of Palestine and the continuing occupation of Arab territories by Israel are explosive factors that have continued to fuel the conflict and have led the way to violence of all kinds, terrorism, regional confrontation and international crises.

The Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization met last Saturday, 9 December 2006, under the presidency of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. It welcomed all international efforts and initiatives aimed at resuming the peace process, in particular as concerns the Palestinian-Israeli track, which will be the cornerstone of any solution to the other crises in the region. The Executive Committee believes that there are very promising opportunities on the horizon that must be seized in order that the peace process may be resumed and practical and specific mechanisms set up to resolve the situation.

More than one party has proposed that an international conference be held to resolve the Israeli-Arab question in all its aspects. That would be a sound and appropriate decision and should be given greater thought so as to ensure the success of such a conference. There is no doubt that, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, that initiative, which was also welcomed by Israel, will lead to a resumption of serious negotiations if appropriate mechanisms are found in response to that call for calm.

We underscore the importance of the proposal to send an international monitoring force to the region to consolidate the general calm and the ceasefire so that a general and mutual ceasefire can be observed. That international force could be placed between the Israeli and Palestinian parties.

At its last meeting, the PLO Executive Committee reaffirmed that the PLO is the sole address and legal representative of the Palestinian people. It is the sole forum responsible for negotiations. In fact, negotiations will always be undertaken by the PLO. Any national Palestinian crisis or issues that arise in the occupied Palestinian territories are an internal matter, and thus the PLO, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, has always been, and will remain, ready and capable of undertaking negotiations on the final status, without any preconditions, at the earliest time possible.

With regard to our Israeli counterparts, Israel should abstain from using pretexts and false excuses for not meeting deadlines on negotiations and achieving peace. Israel should acknowledge the difficulties that have arisen and that have undermined any serious peace talks in the past. Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to carry out its unbridled campaigns of illegal colonial settlement, including in East Jerusalem. It has continued to confiscate Palestinian land and to build the illegal, racist separation wall. It is also continuing a policy of extrajudicial killing, and arbitrary arrests and has destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and property. In addition to other collective punishment measures that it has taken, Israel has detained more than 10,000 Palestinians in its prisons. Israel has closed roads and crossing points; it has set up hundreds of barricades and checkpoints. All this has dismembered Palestinian territory and isolated East Jerusalem from the rest of Palestine.

Israel must honour its commitments in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, by respecting the applicability of this Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The imperative for peace in the Middle East requires the occupying Power, Israel, to renounce its tactical manoeuvres by which it claims that is desires peace while at the same time it carries out practices that shake the very foundation of the peace process and destroy opportunities for peace.

We reaffirm that there are a number of opportunities for achieving peace in the Middle East through serious negotiation and through the adoption of mechanisms to create a positive climate for resumption of negotiations so that the objective we are

all seeking can be achieved — namely, the restoration of peace.

The Security Council, as the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, therefore, must shoulder its tasks, take the necessary measures to set up an appropriate environment and assist the parties to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli problem, at the very heart of which is the Palestinian question. These measures include the complete withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, in order to guarantee the establishment of two States, Israel, which already exists, and a Palestine to be established on the Palestinian territory that was occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. A just and negotiated solution must be found to the question of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

I repeat here that the proposals made by President Abbas during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 29 November 2006 — namely, that a Palestinian State will be a peaceful State, living in security and peace, in good neighbourliness with its neighbours, including Israel — will be a fundamental pillar for regional and international security. If that objective can be achieved, the Middle East region will enjoy peace, security, coexistence and prosperity. Is this not the ultimate objective that we all are seeking — one that we have been seeking for a number of years?

Mr. Carmon (Israel): I wish to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for addressing us this morning, and by taking this opportunity to make mention of his 10 years of service, specifically as it pertains to our region. It is, of course, impossible in the allotted time to fully reflect on the Secretary-General's legacy. Nonetheless, I want to thank him for his many years of dedication to this Organization and to the nations of the world.

Allow me to commend the Secretary-General on his remarks this morning, where he comprehensively addressed the conflicts in our region in an unbiased, balanced manner, turning to both sides constructively — which, I must add, is not a traditional narrative we hear at the United Nations and its various organs, as the Secretary-General himself has stated. We offer him our deepest appreciation.

The analysis of events in the Middle East offered by Member States and heard in statements delivered in this world body tends to be misleading. Symptoms are routinely mistaken for causes, and decisions are made based on rhetoric rather than reality. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is erroneously identified by some as the source of all instability in our region. And yet, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is actually the consequence — not the cause — of extremism and radicalism, of incitement and intolerance, of hate and terrorism, all poisoning our region.

Our region — our world — is challenged by warring ideologies. It is no surprise then that the road to peace runs directly through the battlefield, between moderates and extremists. Unless the international community is willing to stand up and confront the enemies of peace, progress will never be made, no matter how much we yearn for peace, no matter what we are willing to sacrifice for it.

The extremist-moderate divide can be heard in the different voices in our region. Let us listen to what the Hamas Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said while visiting Iran a few days ago:

> "We will never recognize the Zionist Government and will continue our jihad-like movement until the liberation of Jerusalem. We have a strategic depth here in the Islamic Republic of Iran and throughout the Islamic Arab world."

Let us listen to what the First Vice-President of Iran, Parviz Davoudi, told Prime Minister Haniyeh during the same visit: "The Iranian Government and nation will continue their all-out support for the Palestinian Government led by Hamas."

Now let us listen to the other voices in our region, telling Palestinians and Israelis to return to the negotiating table in order to guarantee security and stability for the people of the region.

The vast difference between those voices is precisely the reason why we must insist on the international community's three conditions for Hamas to recognize Israel, renounce violence and abide by previous agreements. Without meeting the three conditions, the Palestinian Authority will continue to support violence and terror, not peace and prosperity. The vast difference between those voices is also the reason why the international community must insist on

the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Without fully ensuring the end of Hizbollah's State within a State, the region will remain in danger of extremist influence.

The vast difference between those voices is the same reason why the international community cannot tolerate a nuclear Iran. It is with particular indignation that, as we sit here in this Council, on the other side of the world — on our side of the world — in Iran, in a country whose President has threatened to wipe another Member State off the map, we hear of a conference under way with its own "experts and scholars", concluding that the Holocaust never happened. As offensive as this is to the State of Israel and to the Jewish people, it must be equally as appalling to the States Members of this world body, whose founding principle and noble mission were the world's answer to the horrors and extremism of the Second World War and the tragedy of the Holocaust, as reflected in the very first clauses of the United Nations Charter.

Iran's denial of the Holocaust, its pursuit of nuclear weaponry, and its strategic backing of Hamas and Hizbollah — and who knows what next? — threaten peace and security. Iran cannot and will not rewrite history. It cannot deny the Holocaust, yet it remains the duty of the international community to make sure that those extremists do not write the world's future and the future of our children.

The international community must, then, do more than convene repeat debates and initiatives. It must make it abundantly clear throughout the region that supporting coexistence is what is needed, while supporting terror has its price. Being soft on the extremists and placating them in exchange for insincere commitments will not buy us their patience or even their compliance. It will merely guarantee their triumph.

The formula for peace has already been prescribed. It is found in the road map and in various forums of the international community, some of which the United Nations itself is part of. At its very heart is the principle of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. That vision has been consistently reaffirmed over the years, particularly in the past few months, by Israel's leadership.

Sadly, however, the vision remains unmatched on the Palestinian side. Israel embarked on the painful course of disengagement from the Gaza Strip last year to show the Palestinians its commitment to peace. In return for disengagement, we received terror. Over the past year, more than 1,000 Qassam rockets and mortar shells have been fired by Palestinian terrorists at southern Israeli communities and towns. Weapons have also been and are still continuously smuggled into Gaza. Corporal Gilad Shalit was kidnapped by Palestinian terrorists and is still being deprived of his freedom. Those are not overtures of peace and moderation. These are the overtures of terror and extremism.

The ceasefire two weeks ago was once again a sign of our willingness to try our hand at peace. Israel wishes to maintain the ceasefire as a means to end the violence and enable progress in political negotiations. For that reason, Israel is exercising restraint and maintaining the ceasefire despite repeated violations by Palestinian terrorists.

Our commitment to peace is also the reason why resolution 1701 (2006) must be fully implemented in southern Lebanon. The full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) remains a test for this Council. It can bring stability to the region, but in order for that to happen, our kidnapped soldiers Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev must be released immediately and unconditionally. An active and efficient United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is also needed, as is the full deployment of the Lebanese army over all its territory. The arms embargo must be enforced and the border with Syria must be monitored for trafficking. Secretary-General Annan has made it a personal campaign to support the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and we trust that the incoming Secretary-General will continue such efforts.

We understand that engaging in our region does not come without frustrations, but the solution is not to bypass essential steps in order to create the illusion of progress. It is not to find forums that allow abuse of the automatic vote. It is not to construct a one-sided narrative in which only side, Israel, has obligations, while the other side, the Palestinians, have only inalienable rights. Those venues, sometimes hosted by the United Nations, simply show that they are good only for highlighting differences, not for resolving them.

If we have not yet turned the vision of peace into reality, it is not for lack of meetings in this Council or

the Assembly. It is not for lack of agreements or resolutions or international conferences. It is simply for the lack of an appropriate partner on the other side to confront the seeds of extremism and embrace moderation. In answer to your question, Mr. President, a partner is one who will at least abide by the very basic fundamental conditions set forth by the international community itself. Direct negotiations with partners willing to make concessions, as Israel has already demonstrated in the historic peace made with two of its neighbours, is the only way forward. As the Secretary-General said in his statement this morning,

> "it is the parties involved who bear the primary responsibility for peace. No one can make peace for them, impose peace on them, or want peace more than they do".

I hope that the moderates in our region understand what needs to be done in order for peace to be realized, and where the real threat to our region lies. There have been far too many victims in this conflict — victims from both sides, neither of which has a monopoly on that status or on human suffering. Israelis, Lebanese and Palestinians all deserve better. They deserve to see real efforts in our region.

Recent developments in the past month show what will happen if we refuse to engage moderates and allow extremists to cast their dark shadows of influence. We must join hands in fighting extremism and radicalism, incitement and intolerance, terrorism and hate. Only then will the parties find themselves on the road to peace — a road wide enough for all citizens of the Middle East — resulting in the revitalization and fulfilment of real peace in our region.

Mr. Iddi (United Republic of Tanzania): I want to join other speakers in thanking you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate on the situation in the Middle East. Events in the Middle East continue to remind us of the complexity of the task of bringing about a lasting and just settlement to the age-old conflict that has brought great suffering and destruction to the region. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2006/956) and his insightful statement to the Council.

The United Republic of Tanzania has, over the years, remained gravely concerned about the endless violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the loss of many lives, including those of women and children, and the destruction of critical infrastructure. We have continuously reminded Israel that, while it has a right to protect its citizens, it needs to exercise maximum restraint, especially when reacting to individual acts of violence directed at its territory. In the same vein, we have called upon the Palestinian Authority to halt all acts of violence directed against Israel, including the firing of rockets, which in their totality undermine compliance with peace agreements.

We are keenly conscious that the Security Council has for many years supported the search for peace in the Middle East. That is demonstrated in its numerous resolutions, as well as its support for the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and other agreements that have been reached by the parties involved in the conflict. In addition, the Council has continuously supported the efforts of the Quartet in the implementation of the Road Map, seeking a two-State solution — a Palestinian and an Israeli State — living side by side in peace and security.

Regrettably, despite all those efforts, a lasting solution to the Palestinian question remains elusive. There has been more talk than there has been action. That state of affairs must be reversed, and agreements must be translated into serious and concrete action. It is up to the Palestinians and the Israelis to realize that no peace agreement will be viable unless both of them accept, and act in line with, common aspirations for a two-State solution. They must both comply with their obligations to the Road Map and the requirements of the Quartet. For its part, the international community must assist in every way possible, so that the peace accords are implemented.

With that in mind we are following with keen interest renewed signals hinting at a revival of the peace process. We therefore urge Palestinians to forge a Government of national unity and to work with Israel towards peace and security for all in the region. We therefore welcome the agreement between Prime Minister Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas to establish a ceasefire in Gaza, and we hope that it will hold and contribute to an atmosphere supportive of the peace process.

We welcome the proposal for an international peace conference on the Middle East. We see it as an opportunity to generate positive political commitment to resolve the Palestinian question in the search for

durable peace in the region. We also view the current climate as conducive to the launching of a serious peace process leading to a comprehensive solution to the conflict. It must not be wasted.

The United Republic of Tanzania expresses its appreciation for the regional efforts of Arab States in the search for peace and stability in the Middle East, including helping to avert the humanitarian crisis confronting the Palestinian people. The current ceasefire should provide a real opportunity to bring about a lasting settlement that guarantees security and prosperity for the region and to avert further humanitarian tragedies. The situation calls for renewed emphasis on supporting the parties and ensuring that the people of Palestine can control their own destiny in peace and hope, and that the people of Israel obtain a real chance to live in security and in full partnership with their neighbours.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, recent events, including the killing of a leading politician, Cabinet resignations and anti-Government rallies, have contributed to increased tensions. The deterioration of the security situation is placing the country's democratic system in danger, thereby threatening its independence. We call for maximum self-restraint and for the kind of wisdom required to bring about a unified, peaceful Lebanon. The people of Lebanon deserve nothing less.

Mr. Saltanov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This is not the first time in recent months that the Security Council is meeting to discuss the question of the Middle East. That illustrates the mounting concern in the international community about the deteriorating situation in the region, which is having a very negative effect on international stability and security. That is why the initiative by the State of Qatar to hold today's Council meeting is both timely and important.

We must note that the situation throughout the Middle East region is dangerously unbalanced — a trend that is unfortunately growing. Several hotspots of tension have arisen in the region, which are to a great extent interlinked and mutually influencing. That is the Middle East, and we must take that reality into account. The lack of resolution to one conflict situation there creates others, as well as overall regional instability. The search to a solution to the problem of the Middle East therefore requires an integrated approach. It also requires collective multilateral efforts that include the participation of directly interested parties, States in the region, as well as the international community. Unilateral steps, and the use of force in particular, can only serve to further to aggravate the conflict.

It is particularly urgent to lend fresh impetus to a negotiated settlement to what is both the oldest and newest conflict in political history, namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict. That is of course one of the main problems of the Middle East. We have the reference points for a search for mutually acceptable outcomes. They are contained in the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Madrid terms of reference and the Quartet Road Map. The Arab Peace Initiative also has the positive potential to provide for the full normalization of relations between the Arab countries and Israel. Recently, efforts have been made in the area that is central to a settlement in the Middle East, namely, Palestine and Israel, including the assistance of key regional parties and the international mediators of the Quartet, towards restoring the political process. An important step taken in that area, namely, the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, must, in our view, be made comprehensive and be extended to the West Bank. We must try to achieve a complete cessation of violence, terrorist acts and incitement to terrorism, wherever those may originate. It is equally important to support the willingness to enter into direct dialogue that was expressed by both the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Olmert, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas.

Nevertheless, there has been no breakthrough so far. In order to eliminate the obstacles to dialogue, we must remove the remaining sensitive issues for both parties. Those include the release of the Israeli soldier and a solution to the fate of the Palestinians detained in Israel. There is also another element that is slowing down the Palestinian-Israeli summit — that is the fact that a coalition Palestinian Government has not yet been formed — a Government that is capable of reflecting in its programme and activities the well-known criteria set out by the Quartet.

The situation in the Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, in particular the socio-economic and humanitarian situation, remains extremely difficult. The continuing blockade, severe restrictions on movement of people and goods and the closing of the crossing points affect, above all,

ordinary people and create a mood of pessimism and hopelessness among the Palestinian people. That state of affairs can no longer be tolerated and the situation must be resolved.

In resolving those important issues, we must not lose sight of the strategic goal — the achievement of a just settlement to the Palestinian problem on the basis of the principle of creating a sovereign, democratic, territorially contiguous Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel in peace and security. The main instrument for achieving that is the Road Map, which was approved in the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and which has received international legal status.

It is extremely important that the document be accepted by both parties — the Israelis and the Palestinians. It may, of course, be implemented through mutually linked agreed steps by both parties. That is the approach that prevails in the Quartet. The Road Map is a generally recognized and effective instrument for international assistance in the situation in the Middle East, and it will serve as the basis for our future work.

The events of the past year, the crisis in Lebanon and Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip have confirmed the argument that peace in the Middle East, by definition, can only be comprehensive and must cover all negotiation tracks — Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian. Russia is in favour of a speedy resumption of collective efforts towards peace through negotiations, including halting the occupation begun in 1967 and ensuring normal conditions of security and development for all the States of the region, including Israel. It must be recognized that the deadlock in one of the areas of negotiation is holding back progress in other areas. For that reason, steps aimed at reviving the Syrian and Lebanese parts of the peace settlement are so important.

In the view of my delegation, the time has come to take a fresh look at the proposal to convene an international conference on the Middle East. We spoke in favour of that idea last year. It is gaining growing recognition in the world and in the region and is in accordance with the Road Map, in which an international conference was prescribed as an important element of progress. However, such a major event, whose task we see as relaunching the peace process in the Middle East, must be well organized and must receive the approval of all of the interested parties.

In conclusion, allow me, on behalf of the Russian Federation to express our great appreciation for the substantial contribution made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, in consolidating the efforts of the international community to solve the problems in the Middle East.

Ms. Štrofová (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his opening statement and for presenting his comprehensive report on the Middle East, containing valuable observations and thoughts. Thank you also, Mr. President, for organizing and chairing today's thematic debate to discuss the recent developments in the Middle East.

During the previous meeting on a ministerial level in September, we witnessed a very useful and constructive exchange of ideas on recent developments in the Middle East. Slovakia feels strongly encouraged by the prevailing opinion in the United Nations Security Council on the need to revive the peace process in the region and on the necessity to move forward in promoting a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict in general, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

Peace that is capable of promoting and delivering stability, security and prosperity to the entire Middle East is today more than ever a vital need. As the tragic developments on the ground — notably in Gaza last month — have once again proved to all of us — there is no military solution to the many challenges and problems of the region, with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute at the core. We remain convinced that such a settlement could and should be achieved only through peaceful negotiations and full implementation of all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the principles defined by the Quartet in the Road Map.

In that regard, we welcome the agreement of last week between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza. That is a crucial confidence-building measure and a vital step and prerequisite towards a much-needed sustained period of calm that could encompass the entire region. We therefore hope and expect that both parties will exercise their utmost restraint and do everything

possible not to jeopardize further possible progress and promising prospects for peace.

In that connection, we express our deep concern about any statements or efforts aimed at questioning or denying the Holocaust, as well as the right of Israel to exist. Such acts of clear incitement to hatred only contribute to further destabilization of the entire Middle East region and undermine the ongoing peace efforts.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm Slovakia's support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and negotiations between the two sides. We are convinced that the Quartet still represents the most appropriate mechanism for advancing the peace process. The updated Road Map reflects recent developments on the ground and is the most efficient plan for achieving a lasting peace settlement to the conflict. We welcome the ongoing efforts of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to form a Government of National Unity. We hope and expect that such a Government will be committed to Quartet principles and that its political platform will enable an early engagement as well as the continuation of dialogue towards a solution to the Middle East conflict.

We also hope and reiterate our call for an immediate end to violence by Palestinian factions and attacks on Israel, notably the launching of rockets against Israeli population centres, and for the release of the abducted Israeli soldier.

We remain deeply concerned over the economic and humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza. In this regard, we welcome the continuation and expansion of the Temporary International Mechanism, which enables the channelling of resources and delivery of assistance directly to the Palestinian people, thereby addressing their urgent humanitarian and financial needs. To this end, we urge Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. We also call for full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and for all border crossings be reopened and remain open.

At the same time, we expect the Israeli Government to continue its commitment to peace in the Middle East, based on principles laid out in the Road Map, and to refrain from steps and activities that may contradict the principles of international law. In this context, we repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian Ministers and legislators in Israeli custody and for the freeze of all settlement activities.

Turning to Lebanon, Slovakia is very concerned about the current developments in the country. We confirm our strong support of the Lebanese Government legitimately elected last year in free and democratic parliamentary elections. We welcome and support all efforts and steps undertaken by the Lebanese authorities to regain control and authority over the whole of its territory and to re-establish stability and security within the country.

Lebanon needs stability. Only then can it be reconstructed and further developed. We believe that stability, reconstruction and development are in the interest of all Lebanese parties, including Hizbollah, which should act responsibly. The national dialogue has to continue. We are convinced that all disputes have to be resolved at the negotiation table and not on the streets, where there is always a risk of provocation and escalation of the conflict. That is dangerous.

Lebanon is currently going through a very difficult time. We must work towards the diminution of tensions and not their increase. All relevant actors in the country and the whole of the region have to act with utmost responsibility, keeping in mind the consequences of a possible escalation of the situation. We are convinced that an escalation would not serve anybody.

Lebanon and its people have already suffered enough. The international community should not allow further destabilization of the country and of the whole region. Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity have to be respected by everybody, including all actors inside and outside the country, Lebanon's neighbours, and countries such as Iran.

The national dialogue must continue with the aim of reaching consensus on several important issues, including disarmament of all militia in the country, which, through their offensive acts, represent a constant threat to the stability and security of Lebanon and its neighbours.

The Lebanese Government has to become the sole authority and must maintain a monopoly on the use of force within its territory. In this respect, we would also like to emphasize the importance of ensuring full compliance with the arms embargo

imposed in resolution 1701 (2006) and of making progress towards the normalization of relations between Lebanon and Syria, as well as the delineation of their common borders, including in the area of the Sheba'a Farms. We are convinced that the resolution of these issues would significantly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the region.

Last, but not least, we should also not forget the need for the two abducted Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hizbollah on 12 July 2006 to be released. We also understand the need to resolve the issue of the Lebanese prisoners and we encourage the respective authorities to make progress on that issue.

We fully understand that the situation in Lebanon and the broader region is complicated and that it takes time to make progress on certain issues. However, we wish to underline that progress can only be achieved through peaceful means and negotiations. As has already been proven on several occasions, there is no military or violent solution to any conflict or dispute. Reconstruction of the country and further development can proceed only under peaceful circumstances. A stable and prosperous Lebanon would significantly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the whole of the Middle East region.

In conclusion, I reiterate our belief that there is still a window of opportunity to reinvigorate the peace process in the Middle East. That window of opportunity should be seized by all concerned, and especially the relevant parties, through concrete and immediate action. We hope for and encourage continuous engagements among all the parties to this long and protracted conflict.

Mr. Wolff (United States): There can be no denying that today's thematic debate focuses on a goal that we all share, namely, sustainable peace in the Middle East. The aspirations of the people of the region for a more secure and prosperous future have been left unfulfilled for too long. In this regard, the United States remains firmly committed to the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as well as to the Road Map and the principles contained therein, as the Road Map is the only agreed international basis upon which to move forward towards that goal.

As President Bush noted unequivocally before the General Assembly,

> "I am committed to two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. I am committed to a Palestinian State that has territorial integrity and will live peacefully with the Jewish State of Israel. This is a vision set forth in the Road Map, and helping the parties reach this goal is one of the great objectives of my presidency." (A/61/PV.10, pp. 10-11)

To help make this goal a reality, President Bush has repeatedly stressed that the United States would pursue diplomatic efforts to engage moderate regional leaders, help the Palestinians strengthen and reform their security sector, and support the parties in their efforts to come together to resolve their differences.

In part, to this end, the United States is the single largest donor to the Palestinian people, having provided $468 million in direct assistance in 2006. But while we work closely with our Quartet partners and our friends in the region to create an environment that will facilitate progress towards the realization of this two-State vision, we must make certain that our parallel efforts here at the United Nations bolster, and do not inadvertently undermine, the pursuit of a lasting peace in the region.

In this regard, the United States is disappointed that in recent weeks the Security Council and the General Assembly have indulged in debate over an excessive number of politicized and biased resolutions that do not contribute constructively, in our view, to that effort, nor have they enabled any progress towards the two-State solution in accordance with the Road Map. Calls for high-level debate and a greater role for the Security Council in encouraging peace efforts cannot sidestep the fundamental fact that the ultimate responsibility for progress towards peace rests with the parties and with their fulfilment of the parallel obligations they have agreed to undertake in accordance with the Road Map.

Therefore, the role of the international community, including this body, must be to help create an environment that will enable the parties to come together to resolve their differences. We must ask ourselves whether that goal will be achieved through the sort of polarized, hortatory debate that has characterized recent Security Council and General Assembly discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the region itself, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have reached agreement on an important ceasefire in Gaza, and Prime Minister Olmert has delivered an address making clear his interest in working towards peace with the Palestinians. President Abbas has deployed security forces to northern Gaza to try to enforce that fragile ceasefire, and Israel has demonstrated remarkable restraint in not responding to recent rocket attacks into Israel.

In order to build on that progress, the United States is actively involved in efforts to reform the Palestinian security sector. We are engaged in that important effort because we recognize that, ultimately, the only way that real progress is going to be made is if Palestinian security forces are able to bring stability to Gaza and prevent attacks against Israel.

With Israel, the United States has pressed for concrete progress related to Palestinian access and movement within and between the West Bank and Gaza. We are pleased at the success of the European Union Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah checkpoint in Gaza, and we are working to build on that success. While we recognize that important progress in this area remains to be made, the United States remains committed to working actively on this issue with both parties in order to make real, concrete progress and to improve the lives of millions of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

Implementation of the Road Map necessitates partnership. The United States has worked with the international community to support the efforts of President Abbas to establish a Palestinian Government that accepts the Quartet principles of renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. We commend President Abbas for his efforts to break the current impasse caused by a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority that fails to govern responsibly.

We deeply regret that Hamas has walked away from a proposal for a technocratic Government that would have allowed for early engagement. We were also dismayed at the statement made by Palestinian Authority Government Prime Minister Haniya on 8 December in Tehran that the Palestinians would never recognize Israel. That position demonstrates that the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government is not interested in becoming a partner for peace and continues to fail in its duty to the Palestinian people to govern responsibly.

Having mentioned Tehran, I wish to state that the United States strongly condemns the recent Iranian-sponsored conference on the Holocaust, which called into question the magnitude of the horrors of the Holocaust, and rejects in the strongest possible terms any and all efforts that seek to refute the historical fact of the Holocaust.

When one considers the many aspects of this issue, it is clear that any discussion of fostering greater peace in the region must include Lebanon. The conflict launched by Hizbollah in July caused enormous suffering and destruction in both Lebanon and Israel, highlighting the risks of acquiescing to a status quo in Lebanon that permits militias to remain armed and unchecked.

The United States supports the efforts of the democratically elected Government of Lebanon as it expands its sovereignty over all its territory. We continue to call for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), particularly the provisions regarding the disbanding and disarming of the militias. We call once again for the immediate, safe and unconditional release of the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser, kidnapped on 12 July.

The current demonstrations in Lebanon are an attempt by Hizbollah and its allies, with support from Syria and Iran, to overthrow Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's democratically elected pro-reform, pro-sovereignty Government, in a clear bid to re-establish Syrian influence over Lebanon. The recent assassination of Lebanese Minister of Industry Pierre Gemayel is especially shocking in that light and underscores the threat to the physical safety of Lebanon's remaining Cabinet members.

The people of the Middle East deserve a realistic approach to fostering peace and security. For decades, the United States has remained committed to working directly with the parties. We call upon others to join us in pursuing viable diplomatic strategies rooted in a clear understanding of the underlying sources of this conflict. Only that approach will serve the interests of peace and advance our collective aspirations for a more secure, stable and democratic Middle East. Thank you, Mr. President, for your own efforts to that end.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would urge members with lengthy statements to kindly deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Many thanks, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani, for convening this open Council debate. Argentina recognizes the deep commitment of the State of Qatar to the Middle East peace process and wishes to thank you for the efforts that you personally have made this year in that regard.

My delegation thanks and congratulates the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for introducing his report on the developments in the situation in the Middle East during his 10-year term of office. We believe that the analysis provided by Mr. Annan is particularly valuable and should receive careful consideration by the Security Council and the international community in general with an eye to the future.

Argentina agrees with the Secretary-General's analysis and with his main observations and recommendations. In its capacity as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Argentina has on various occasions closely followed the developments described by Mr. Annan, particularly during what we could call the height of the post-Oslo era, the beginning of the second intifada and the current difficult juncture. Based on our own experience during those years, our conclusions are similar to those presented to us by the Secretary-General. Thus, we have repeatedly expressed them throughout our current Council term, which ends this month.

Despite the dismal panorama presented by the Middle East peace process — on which all speakers have agreed — today we are more than ever convinced that we must not allow the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the region to sink into oblivion. We know that the primary responsibility for the current, regrettable state of affairs lies with the parties that have long been directly involved in this conflict. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to point out that the international community in general, and the Security Council in particular, share part of that responsibility. This body's inability to respond to — and put an end to — the deepening crisis in the Middle East has been particularly obvious, especially over the past two years and, I would say, the past year.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the heart of the Middle East peace process, and that is the aspect to which we must attach the highest priority. In recent years, the Quartet, through the Road Map, has been entrusted with the task of leading the process, defining what the outcome of the peace process should be and the path that the parties should follow in order to bring it about. In spite of the efforts undertaken since 2002, the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security has continued to be as elusive and as difficult to achieve as ever, and progress has stalled in the first stages.

That failure does not mean that the Quartet and the Road Map are mechanisms that have lost their usefulness or that they should be abandoned. However, it is clear that, if the Quartet does not engage more actively in monitoring the implementation of a revised Road Map and does not play a more proactive role in the peace process, it will become of little relevance. We therefore call upon the members of the Quartet, the main regional players and the Security Council to reflect deeply on this matter and to reactivate their role before it is too late.

As we have said before, the parties directly involved are primarily responsible for the stalemate in the peace process. In recent years, neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority has fulfilled its obligations, and the exchange of mutual accusations has not contributed to the fostering of a climate of trust and cooperation.

We need hardly recall that some Israeli practices, including the expansion of settlements, the construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank, extrajudicial executions, the excessive use of force, the arbitrary arrest of Palestinian officials and legislators and the stifling of the economy of the Gaza Strip do not contribute to fostering among the Palestinian population a sense of confidence and optimism about the future. Worse, they fuel extremism and encourage the rejection of compromise. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has further exacerbated the already dire living situation faced by the Palestinian people.

On the other hand, the inability or unwillingness of the Palestinians to maintain peace and order in Gaza, to prevent further rocket attacks against Israel, to release the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, to reform its institutions, to eradicate corruption — a failure that has very significant political consequences — and to combat violent extremism do not help to generate

confidence in Israel regarding the need to negotiate with a Palestinian counterpart — a counterpart with which it will, eventually, have to negotiate. Regrettably, the current attitude of the Hamas Government not to comply with international requirements further complicates the situation.

In spite of that disheartening picture, we believe that there are some positive events that have the potential to change the dynamic. One is the Gaza ceasefire, which we believe should be extended to the West Bank and accompanied by a number of additional measures, such as the deployment of international observers on the basis of agreement with both parties. Talks should also be resumed between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas on the possible establishment of a mechanism for the protection of civilians that is acceptable to both parties.

In this context, we also support the proposal to convene an international conference with a similar format to that used at the 1991 Madrid Conference, with a view to relaunching the peace process on all of its tracks.

Although we have focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we also attach a great deal of importance to the quest for a resolution on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks. With regard to the situation between Israel and Lebanon, we reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and other Council resolutions. With respect to the situation between Israel and Syria, a fundamental element of the search for comprehensive peace is the end of the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights and the return of that territory to Syria, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm once again Argentina's profound commitment to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East that benefits all the peoples of the region, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): We would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar for having honoured us with his presence this morning.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and to express British appreciation to him for all of his efforts, including his work to establish the Quartet. I think that this may well the Secretary-General's last public speaking opportunity in this forum, so I would like to pay tribute to him for what he has done over so many years working with the Council.

We very much agree that the key issue remains ending the frustration and instability that prevail in the Middle East through a comprehensive and just solution. Colleagues have already sketched out the elements of a prescription for such a solution. Progress in Israel and Palestine is of the utmost importance for the achievement of peace and stability in the region. It is essential that we make progress towards a comprehensive peace and a two-State solution and recognize, at the same time, that we need a regional approach which encompasses all the relevant issues.

For the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Blair and his Government remain fully engaged and committed to that purpose. The United Kingdom welcomes the ceasefire in Gaza, which came into effect on 27 November. We hope that it will be a first step towards further progress. We maintain that the Road Map is the best way to achieve a two-State solution. Both Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas have reiterated their commitment to it as the way forward. We continue to call upon both sides to implement their commitment in full. We hope that a meeting between the Prime Minister and the President can take place at the earliest opportunity and that it will lead to real progress.

The United Kingdom continues to call for the release of the captured Israeli soldier, Corporal Shalit, and for Palestinian legislative Council members detained in Israel to be accorded their full legal rights and to be either charged or released.

We will continue to support the Palestinian people through the Temporary International Mechanism. So far, the European Union has contributed a total of more than €186 million to that Mechanism. That includes payment to key workers in the public sector, such as health care workers, teachers, the poorest Palestinian Authority employees and some of the most vulnerable Palestinians. Those allowances have helped to keep basic services running, put money into the economy and provided a livelihood for the poorest Palestinian families.

We welcome President Abbas's efforts over the past few months to form a national unity Government. We still need a Palestinian Government that we can work with. The United Kingdom supports the Quartet's call for a Palestinian Government to be formed with a platform based on the Quartet's three principles: renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. Until then, we will continue to provide support to the Palestinian people directly.

The United Kingdom and the European Union as a whole underline the importance of preserving and strengthening the capacity of Palestinian institutions. The European Union has expressed its readiness to provide enhanced support to a Palestinian Government with which the EU can engage.

Recent events have further highlighted the need for us to move forward and return to a political process. We express our grave concern at the incident that took place in Beit Hanun on 8 November, which led to the tragic death of Palestinian civilians. We have continued to call on Israel to do everything it can to avoid civilian casualties.

The firing of Qassam rockets from Gaza into Israel must stop. Recent clashes between Hamas and Fatah have led to the deaths of innocent children. All sides in Israel and the occupied territories must intensify efforts to bring all violence to an end. Civilians on both sides have the right to live in peace and security.

We continue to call on Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements, and to dismantle all outposts built since 2001, in line with the provisions of the Road Map. It is essential that the Palestinian Authority make every effort to prevent terrorism, as required under the Road Map. We welcome President Abbas's recent efforts to improve the security situation in Gaza.

We must now all build on this fragile progress to try to create the political, security and economic conditions for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East reflecting all relevant Security Council resolutions, including, most recently, resolution 1701 (2006).

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset, Mr. President, to welcome your well-advised and very timely initiative to convene this ministerial-level meeting. We welcome also the fact that this debate is taking place under the presidency of Qatar — your country — which is playing a stabilizing role in the region. I should like also to thank the Secretariat for the relevant information and analyses which it has made available to us, and the Secretary-General for his outstanding presentation this morning.

In my delegation's view, we cannot have yet another debate in this forum that leads only to fruitless discussions. On the contrary, given the critical situation we are facing, in which any acceptance of the status quo or paralysis would be intolerable and unacceptable, it appears that the time is ripe for the Council to give fresh impetus to the peace process, which, tragically, has been at a standstill for several months.

The strong message that the Council, in its capacity as the primary body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, must send today to the international community as a whole, and primarily to the main protagonists in the conflict, is that of our clearly expressed will that there be an immediate and unconditional resumption of negotiations leading to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Specifically, the Council must unambiguously and firmly support the idea of convening promptly an international conference aimed at putting back on track the measures advocated within the framework of the agreed comprehensive settlement. Such an initiative must involve careful preparations.

In that context, we reaffirm the key role of the Quartet in the resumption of the process. We reaffirm also the validity of all painstakingly negotiated international documents and instruments, such as the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Oslo accords, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the Quartet Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. In this context, the principle of land for peace remains fundamental.

In order for those goals to be attained, such an initiative must break new ground by ensuring that all regional actors are deeply involved. We must recognize the interaction and interconnection among the various crises in the Middle East: the conflict in Palestine, the crisis in Iraq and the crisis in Lebanon.

There is a need, therefore, for a comprehensive approach involving contributions on the part of all neighbouring States in the quest for lasting solutions. We urge the involvement of all regional actors that could help to ease tensions, and we believe that the positive role played by the League of Arab States should be taken into account. The outcome of the meeting held last weekend is testimony of the firm will of the Arab States to find a political solution.

Today it is clear to all that there can be no military solution to this 60-year-old conflict, whose ramifications threaten to engulf an already destabilized region. We thus call for the convening, in the coming months, of an international conference aimed at revitalizing prospects for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution leading to the coexistence of two States — Israel and Palestine — in accordance with the vision set out in the Quartet Road Map, which was endorsed by the Security Council.

We expect the main protagonists henceforth to display the greatest restraint by refraining from violence and from any unilateral acts that could compromise preparations for the proposed international conference, for it is ultimately up to the parties to make the final decision.

Mr. President, it is on the basis of that conviction that my delegation supports the contents of the draft presidential statement prepared by your delegation.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by thanking the Deputy Prime Minister of Qatar for having convened this meeting on an issue that is crucial to international peace and security, that is, lasting peace in the Middle East. I thank the Secretary-General for his report and for his statement, to which we listened very carefully. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the tireless efforts he has deployed over the past 10 years in the service of peace in the Middle East.

France welcomes the recently concluded ceasefire between Palestinians and Israelis in the Gaza Strip. The respective commitments of President Mahmoud Abbas and of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert are positive and encouraging signs, following several months of violence which took the lives of hundreds of civilians. We call on the parties strictly to abide by their commitments and encourage them promptly to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

That positive decision must be followed by other confidence-building measures. France thus calls for the unconditional and immediate release of Corporal Shalit and of the Palestinian elected officials and political figures imprisoned in Israel.

The implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh arrangements and the full respect of the Agreement on Movement and Access would be two other measures that could restore confidence and promote in particular the recovery of the Palestinian economy. Israel's remittance of the tax revenue due to the Palestinian Authority from the beginning of the year would also be likely to help bring rapid relief to the disastrous humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories.

Cessation of violence, in order to be effective and lasting, must be accompanied by a real political plan. Both parties have responsibilities in this respect. The Palestinians must not deviate from the path marked out for more than 15 years in the context of the peace process. France has constantly supported the efforts of President Abbas for national unity, and from this viewpoint the recent inter-Palestinian clashes are very disturbing.

France calls on all of the parties to exercise restraint and to act responsibly. We invite all of the Palestinian factions, and Hamas in particular, to cooperate with the Palestinian President in the formation of a new Government whose political platform would reflect the Quartet's principles. Such a Government would be a legitimate partner of the international community, from which it would receive the necessary support for the implementation of economic, political and security reforms.

Israel, for its part, has a duty to refrain from any unilateral action that would undermine the prospects for creating a politically, economically and geographically viable Palestinian State. It must, in accordance with the opinion of the International Court of Justice, put an end to settlement activities and to the construction of the wall within the West Bank.

France will continue to work with determination for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution, based on the Security Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the land-for-peace principle and on the Arab Peace Initiative.

With the fragile hope that was created by the ceasefire, we remain convinced that an international

conference, carefully prepared in coordination with all of the parties, should be organized in the near future. The Quartet seems to us to be the appropriate forum for discussing and establishing the conditions for the success of such a conference. France recalls its wish that a meeting of the Quartet at the level of principals be held swiftly to this end.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): Mr. President, let me begin by thanking you for convening this important debate. Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing and report.

The complexity of these issues requires that we sometimes take a step back and look at the picture from a distance. The Secretary-General's report and briefing did just that. I will reflect on some of the proposals in the report, while others require more thorough consideration. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for keeping the international community focused on the goal of bringing lasting peace to the Middle East throughout his tenure.

Two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within internationally recognized borders — that is the goal. There is nothing new in that, but, as the Secretary-General also indicates, the longer it takes to reach that goal, the harder it is to reassure people that there is reason to hope, that there is a better future ahead. Therefore, it is essential that the parties, the regional players and the international community rededicate themselves to the goal.

The key to success, however, rests with the parties. The international community can help, working with the parties to lay the groundwork for a solution. The Quartet plays a pivotal role in this effort. But success can come only when the parties are committed and ready.

To this end, there are, again, encouraging recent developments. First, there is a ceasefire in Gaza. It may be only a first step, but reaching that agreement was not easy. We encourage the parties to extend the ceasefire to include the West Bank, as suggested by the Secretary-General. Secondly, Prime Minister Olmert's speech on 27 November was a welcome Israeli renewed effort towards a negotiated two-State solution. It also indicated Israel's willingness, among other things, to release prisoners, including ministers and parliamentarians, when the captured Israeli soldier is freed.

The challenge is to convert this current opportunity into sustainable change for the better. Both parties must take urgent steps to boost confidence and solve problems that could undermine peace efforts.

First, Israel must ease humanitarian conditions for civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. One such step is to release the Palestinian tax and customs revenues it is withholding. Secondly, the Agreement on Movement and Access must be implemented. Thirdly, it is essential that Israel halt new settlements and outposts, which are in contradiction to Security Council resolutions and the Road Map. Finally, Demark continues to recognize Israel's right to defend itself. Israel must ensure that measures to protect Israeli civilians are in accordance with international law. Disproportionate use of force could hamper the achievement of a lasting solution to the conflict.

Likewise, the Palestinians must build confidence and become a partner with whom it is possible to build lasting peace. First, the captured Israeli soldier must be released immediately. Secondly, Denmark supports President Abbas's efforts to create a national unity Government that reflects Quartet principles. Thirdly, it is essential that all Palestinian factions do their utmost to keep and consolidate the ceasefire and avoid infighting. It is not a solution, but it provides a much-wanted opportunity. With due respect for the desire of the people, I sincerely hope that all parties are ready to make the best of it

At a time when the outlook seemed as grim as ever, the parties succeeded in creating yet another opportunity. All well-intentioned parties must join forces to see if, this time, the peace process can be revived. The parties, the neighbours and the international community, through the Quartet, all must play a part if this moment is to be seized. We agree with the Secretary-General that the Quartet needs to enhance its activities, to play a more active role.

Progress is critical, mainly for the principal parties involved, but equally for the greater region. Over the past summer, we were reminded that conflicts in the greater Middle East region are linked. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the main source of instability in the region, and, as stated by the Secretary-General, without progress on this track, we are not likely to achieve lasting stability in the Middle East.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): Mr. President, at the outset, may I commend your delegation for organizing this debate, which should enable us to examine the possibilities of advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East.

We also wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his excellent and comprehensive report on the Middle East, which unquestionably constitutes the most volatile region in the world and, by implication, the major threat to international peace and security.

The situations in Iraq and Lebanon, coupled with the Iranian nuclear programme, are sources of major concern to the international community. We also share the Secretary-General's observation that the failure to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the long-festering Arab-Israel conflict remains the major underlying source of frustration and instability in the region.

On Lebanon, the progress made in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) makes us cautiously optimistic that the cessation of hostilities, which has so far been maintained without serious incident, will continue to hold. We are encouraged that the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon, in coordination with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, has proceeded satisfactorily and that, in parallel, the Lebanese army has been deployed in the area south of the Litani River and along the Blue Line, leading to the stabilization of the security and military situation in the area.

While we acknowledge those positive developments, we are also mindful of the need for Israel and Lebanon to commit themselves further to the implementation of a permanent ceasefire based on the full acceptance of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006).

After the lengthy period of violence between Palestine and Israel, the mutual ceasefire agreed on between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert has brought relief to those genuinely interested in peace in the Middle East. It is our expectation that the two sides will refrain from violence, endeavour to maintain the ceasefire, and ensure a sustained period of calm that the people of Palestine and Israel seek and deserve.

As part of the much-needed confidence-building steps, we urge Israel to consider reversing the financial ban on the Palestinian Authority and to release the accrued taxes and duties due to the latter. That act would certainly assist the Administration in meeting its financial obligations and bring succour to the Palestinian people, who have suffered greatly from the consequences of the withholding of funds.

The Secretary-General's recommendation for the Quartet and the Security Council to explore the feasibility of consolidating the ceasefire within an international framework deserves serious consideration. He has called for a stronger international role in order to halt the violence and create political space for negotiations.

The elements mentioned in his report, which include consolidating the ceasefire by working with the parties to define its parameters and rules and extending it to the West Bank, the monitoring of the ceasefire and the promotion of unconditional and open-ended talks between the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority, are options worth pursuing.

We remain concerned that the tireless efforts of the Palestinians to form a Government of national unity have failed to bear fruit. In the larger interest of their people, we again urge the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to cooperate to achieve that goal.

The complete satisfaction of the respective dreams or presumed rights of the Israelis and Palestinians may not be possible, which calls for realism and flexibility on both sides. We therefore urge the Quartet members, which are the sponsors of the road map, to act in concert to revitalize the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In that regard, they may want to bear in mind the Secretary-General's recommendation that they find a way to institutionalize their consultations with the relevant regional partners and engage the parties directly in their deliberations. It should also be possible for the Quartet to look again at the road map with a view to restating its basic goals, principles and end destination.

We are attracted by the proposition that a regional approach is needed to resolve the various crises and conflicts in the Middle East today, not least because progress in each area is to a large extent dependent on progress in others, as eloquently stated in the Secretary-General's report. In that regard, we should also learn lessons from past and recent developments at

the international level. It has become evident that power without legitimacy breeds only disaffection, chaos and resistance, and that military supremacy alone cannot offer the desired security.

A sober and objective analysis of the Secretary-General's report can only lead to the conclusion that any attempt to continue with half-baked or temporary solutions would not be feasible. We are convinced that only a peace agreement whose parameters are well known and enjoy widespread international support can bring peace and security between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world, and make a regional system of security possible.

The Security Council bears an onerous responsibility in the search for comprehensive peace in the Middle East and must continue to work assiduously, in concert with others, towards the settlement of the Palestinian problem, which is at the core of the Middle East question, on the basis of its own resolutions, the Arab peace initiative and a revitalized road map. It therefore behooves the international community to encourage the parties to compromise and learn to live side by side, as envisaged in the two-State solution.

Finally, Sir, we thank your delegation for preparing the draft presidential statement, which we fully support.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing today's thematic debate of the Security Council on sustainable peace in the Middle East, under the leadership of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

I would also like to thank and commend the Secretary-General for submitting to the Security Council his insightful report on the Middle East and for providing the Security Council with his highly pertinent and significant observations on that matter. In trying to evaluate and to assess what has transpired in the Middle East during the two years that Greece has served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, and to give our appraisal of where things stand and where they may go from here, we find that the report of the Secretary=General more than adequately covers most of the observations we would have made and coincides to a very large extent with our evaluation of the situation.

In that regard, we share the Secretary-General's assessment of the reasons behind the lack of significant progress in the implementation of the road map. Both sides have indeed failed to live up to their obligations under the first phase of the road map, and we also note with interest the Secretary-General's observations regarding the role of the Quartet in the whole process.

There is much that is contained in the report that the Security Council should reflect upon. For our part, we would like to emphasize that the Arab-Israeli conflict, of which the Palestinian issue is at the core, and that all attempts to find a solution to it should not overlook the wider regional picture and the dynamics involved in that context.

When viewed from a wider regional perspective, a number of issues emerge and come to the surface that go a long way towards explaining the behaviour of all respective parties. From that perspective, what becomes evident is that the countries of the region all have a key role to play and all share in the responsibility for creating the necessary climate conducive to promoting progress in the peace process.

The behaviour and rhetoric coming out of one country of the region tends to have a direct impact on the behaviour and rhetoric of another, and developments in one country have a bearing on developments in another. Given the situation's inherently regional dimension, the United Nations is the most suitably placed forum wherein a solution ought to be sought and supported by all. The United Nations does indeed have a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner on the basis of international legitimacy, and that responsibility applies as equally vis-à-vis the Palestinians and the Arab populations as it does to the Israeli people and to the State of Israel.

Greece wishes to reaffirm its attachment and commitment to the realization of the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and within secure and internationally recognized borders. The proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report constitute a sober and informed insight as to how progress in that direction may be advanced. The parties to the conflict, the countries of the region, as well as the Security Council should explore all possibilities open to them.

It is our profound hope that we will not have to receive a similar report in 10 years' time, and it is our sincere conviction that the peoples of the region and the international community as a whole can ill afford to allow more time to elapse without making significant and substantial progress towards peace.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): I would like to thank you, Sir, and the mission of Qatar for the initiative of holding this important meeting on the Middle East situation. The region is going through another difficult and dangerous crisis period and requires the Council's close attention, given its serious, broad ramifications.

We thank the Secretary-General for his statement and appreciate his comprehensive report. His report includes observations and recommendations that reflect the profound insight that he has acquired in dealing with Middle East issues over his past 10 years in office, and as such they merit our serious consideration.

The September ministerial meeting on the Middle East resulted in shared views among Council members and the relevant parties on the following issues.

First, the Palestinian issue is the key; without its solution there can be no comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Secondly, violence cannot solve the problems; direct negotiations and dialogue, based on moderation, mutual tolerance and understanding, are the only way to achieve progress towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

Thirdly, the international community should accelerate its efforts to move the peace process forward.

However, it is regrettable that, three months after the last ministerial meeting, the situation concerning Palestine has seen further deterioration, despite the strenuous efforts exerted by the relevant parties, including countries of the region. Among other matters, we are deeply concerned about the continuing violence, which is creating a high number of casualties on both sides, Palestine and Israel.

It is true that the international community cannot serve as a substitute for the parties to the conflict themselves, but that by no means diminishes the importance of the international community making efforts to create a conducive environment for the parties to solve the conflict.

The crisis in Lebanon last summer reminded us once again that nothing is more essential than concerted and dedicated efforts and a strong will for peace among the parties themselves, in order to overcome the difficulties that divide Palestinians and Israelis. We therefore welcome the recent agreement by Israel and the Palestinian Authority on a mutual ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. We highly appreciate the leadership shown by President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert to produce that significant achievement.

Japan reiterates its call upon both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to exercise maximum self-restraint in order to ensure that the fragile ceasefire is adhered to. We also urge both parties to make further efforts to extend such an agreement to the West Bank and to achieve a ceasefire there as well.

We call for the safe return of the abducted Israeli soldier, as well as for the release of the Palestinian ministers and parliament members held in custody in Israel.

Direct talks at the highest level between the parties are the only way to open a window to a solution of the problems. It is also our hope — especially at this critical moment — that a direct summit meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert will occur as soon as possible, with a view to the early resumption of the peace negotiations. We take positive note of the recent remark made by Prime Minister Olmert, as it showed his will to break through the current stalemate.

The political deadlock in Palestine continues to be a matter of deep concern. We wish to emphasize here again the critical importance of demonstrating strong political will, backed by determined efforts on the part of all the parties concerned. We wish to express our fervent hope for the continuation of efforts that will result in the formation of a new Palestinian Authority government, as well as our firm expectation that, once established, the new government will make clear that it will pursue peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity with Israel. When that happens, the international community should respond positively with all the support such a welcome development deserves.

We are particularly concerned about the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people, which continues to deteriorate. In that regard, we must impress upon Israel the need to take immediate action on the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority and to restore freedom of movement for the Palestinian people.

Japan has been one of the major donors to Palestinians for many years, and we wish to reaffirm our determination to continue to extend assistance to the Palestinian people. We have been steadily implementing the assistance we have pledged, including the emergency humanitarian assistance of $25 million announced in July this year. We strongly urge the international community to continue to provide the humanitarian assistance urgently needed to cope with the crisis facing Palestinians.

Japan is also working to implement the concept of a corridor of peace and prosperity, which is a development plan for the Jordan Valley through regional cooperation involving Israel, Palestine and Jordan, with a view to realizing coexistence and mutual prosperity in the mid- and long-term perspectives. Japan sent a feasibility study mission to the region in November, and further action will follow.

With respect to the situation in Lebanon, the recent domestic political upheavals notwithstanding, we welcome the fact that the cessation of hostilities has been maintained and that the overall situation has further improved and stabilized following the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), in particular through the extension of State authority in the south. We reaffirm our commitment to the resolution's implementation. There remain, however, many challenges to be addressed, foremost among them Lebanon and Israel, for full implementation of the resolution and lasting stabilization of the situation in Lebanon.

Japan strongly supports the efforts exerted to that end by the Lebanese Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Siniora. Japan hopes that the parties and factions concerned in Lebanon will engage proactively — through dialogue and without resorting to violence — in the efforts aimed at stability and reconstruction in the country and the region. No actions that may contribute to destabilizing the situation in Lebanon can be tolerated. We condemn the assassination of Pierre Gemayel, Minister for Industry, on 21 November.

In order to achieve a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution, it is essential for the international community to address the issues of disarming and disbanding all remaining militias and of the delineation of the border. A comprehensive peace that includes both the Lebanese and the Syrian tracks is the only way to permanent peace there. In that connection, Japan expects Syria to play a proactive role towards the realization of peace and stability in the region.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate the need for the international community to do its utmost to revitalize the Middle East peace process. For its part, Japan, under the new leadership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, reaffirms its readiness and determination to continue its proactive, constructive engagement in the process and to extend the maximum assistance possible to contribute to that end.

Mr. Wang Guangya (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to welcome you to the Council, Mr. Minister, to preside over today's meeting. I also welcome the presence of Secretary-General Annan and thank him for the report (S/2006/956) he submitted to us yesterday.

As a cradle of human civilization, the Middle East is the birthplace of the Mesopotamian civilization and the religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Unfortunately, for the past half-century or so, that land has been plagued by protracted wars and frequent flare-ups, and its peoples have been subjected to all kinds of suffering brought about by occupation, wars, sanctions and so on. The incessant turbulence in the Middle East, with no solution in sight, does not bode well for the prospect of peace and development in the region. Moreover, it negatively affects the peace and stability of the whole world. The current situation is particularly worrisome given the continued conflict between Palestine and Israel, the impasse in the implementation of the Road Map and the lack of progress in both the Lebanese-Israeli and the Syrian-Israeli talks. Where the Middle East is heading is a question of serious concern to the international community.

Against that backdrop, Mr. President, your initiative to hold this ministerial meeting of the Security Council on the question of the Middle East is highly necessary and timely. We support it fully.

For decades, the question of the Middle East mainly found expression in conflicts between Israel and Arab countries. At present, however, various

hotspot issues share the stage, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, the instability in Iraq and other tensions in region. Moreover, they are intertwined and affect each other. The Middle East is undergoing the most profound changes in recent years, which has resulted in an even more complicated overall situation that has a major bearing on international peace and security and on global economic development. No country can respond to it single-handedly, and no country can simply mind its own business. The international community must take a strategic perspective and join hands in a concerted effort to seek a comprehensive settlement.

China appreciates the efforts of the Quartet in promoting peace and facilitating talks and encourages it to play a more proactive role. Yesterday, Secretary-General Annan submitted to the Security Council his final report on the Middle East, which contains a number of bold and detailed proposals for the comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question. They deserve serious consideration by the Council.

While a settlement of the Middle East question cannot be achieved without the support of the international community, the key still lies in the hands of the parties concerned. Decades of confrontation and conflict have left a deep legacy of grievances between Israel and Arab countries. Thus, it is necessary to foster an atmosphere of mutual trust. It is our sincere hope that the parties concerned will break out of the futile mode of offering violence for violence and toughness for toughness, take the initiative to show goodwill and do more to ease tensions.

In that connection, we support efforts by Palestine to form a government of national unity, welcome the willingness expressed by Israel to engage in peace talks and hope that the two parties will work together for an early return to the path of negotiations.

The Security Council bears the solemn responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. The question of the Middle East is the oldest item on the Council's agenda and the Council's biggest headache. The failure to find a solution to the Middle East question, over such a long time, has had a negative impact on the role and authority of the Security Council.

For many years, the Security Council has been in passive firefighting mode. After the outbreak of the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, it took 34 days of arduous consultations for the Security Council to adopt a resolution requesting the two sides to cease hostilities. When United Nations peacekeepers were attacked and lost their lives, the Security Council only expressed its regret in a mild manner, in a presidential statement. Such abnormality has aroused the serious dissatisfaction of many Member States, especially Arab States. That is something the Council must reflect upon. It should transform itself as soon as possible from firefighter to problem solver, come up with innovative ideas, work in the spirit of seeking overall common ground and setting aside minor differences and take an active and pragmatic approach in order to assist in efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and push for the resumption of the Middle East peace process.

After decades of turmoil, the people of the Middle East are tired of endless conflict and instability. In the twenty-first century, when the whole world is advancing rapidly, their desire to achieve peace and join the mainstream of development has become stronger and more urgent. China is willing to work together with the rest of the international community to promote the Middle East peace process and to help the people of the region achieve the goal of peace and development at an early date. If we make concerted efforts, peace in the Middle East will no longer be an elusive dream.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome you, Sir, as you preside over this debate in your capacity as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar. I thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his praiseworthy efforts in offering the Council a broad and detailed overview of the problems in the Middle East. That overview is outlined in the report (S/2006/956) before the Council today, which should lead us to promote a resumption of the peace process in that region.

In that regard, and as has been reflected in the discussions held regularly by the Council, the lack of a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to be a source of frustration and instability in the region. In that regard, a comprehensive approach is needed to resolve the various crises and conflicts in the region. First of all, the parties directly involved must take constructive steps to ease tensions and generate an appropriate climate for the restoration of peace. Efforts of support by the international community will be

viable only if the regional players display the political will to move the process forward.

The main objective should be to put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories by establishing two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and the Road Map defined by the Quartet and endorsed by the Council in resolution 1515 (2003).

The weakening of political institutions and the lack of cohesion in the Palestinian Government since the beginning of 2006 seriously jeopardize the peace process. Extremist groups have taken advantage of the situation to launch terrorist attacks against civilian populations in Israel. Understandably and justifiably, the Israeli authorities have been obliged to respond to those acts of aggression. However, and to avoid a repetition of events like those we saw again in November, that right must be exercised responsibly, avoiding causalities among the civilian population and avoiding the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

The recent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip agreed to between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas has led to new hope that the path of negotiations will replace that of violence. We hope that this first step will be further consolidated and extended to the West Bank, in order to promote the action and leadership of those, in Israel and in Palestine, who advocate a negotiated solution.

For its part, Lebanon, following the tragic armed confrontation that occurred this year and that led to enormous loss of human life and property, also holds a new opportunity for resolving a number of pending problems among the Lebanese themselves.

Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) renews the possibility of addressing the root causes which have kept that country from achieving stability and sovereignty over its territory. That is also an opportunity for promoting peaceful coexistence and working towards a resolution to the conflict with Israel.

In addition, the question of the occupation of the Syrian Golan is still pending. The doors to negotiation between those parties must also be opened if a solution is to be achieved. The experience of this year's war has only underscored the close interrelationship among the various hotbeds of conflict. We need a comprehensive approach that will enable us to make parallel progress towards resolving the various conflicts.

We reiterate our conviction that the conflicts in the Middle East can be resolved only through political negotiation and on the basis of agreements reached by the parties and recognized by the international community. There are no lasting unilateral solutions. In that regard, and as the Secretary-General notes in paragraph 44 of his report, "The Quartet retains its relevance because of its combination of legitimacy, political strength and economic influence".

We appreciate the Secretary-General's appeal to the Quartet to be open to new ideas and initiatives. Similarly, the Road Map is the point of reference to be used for any initiative aimed at resuming the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Therefore, Peru echoes the appeal of the Secretary-General for the international community to engage with the parties concerned in order to reach a final settlement of the Middle East problem.

The President (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Following consultations among the members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

> "The Security Council expresses its deep concern over the situation in the Middle East, with its serious ramifications for peace and security, and underlines the need to intensify efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.
>
> "The Security Council stresses that there can be no military solution to the problems of the region and that negotiation is the only viable way to bring peace and prosperity to peoples throughout the Middle East.
>
> "The Security Council stresses that the parties must respect their obligations under previous agreements, including by putting an end to violence and all aspects of terrorism.
>
> "The Security Council expresses grave concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation and calls for the provision of emergency assistance to the Palestinian people through the temporary international mechanism, international organizations and other official channels.

"The Security Council welcomes the agreement between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza.

"The Security Council welcomes the steps taken by both sides to maintain the ceasefire and expresses its hope that it will lead to a sustained period of calm. It calls on both sides, therefore, to avoid any actions which could jeopardize further progress. It reiterates its call for an end to all aspects of terrorism and violence as set out in previous statements and resolutions.

"The Security Council is mindful of the need to encourage steps to increase confidence in the peace process.

"The Security Council reiterates its call for the Palestinian Authority Government to accept the three Quartet principles.

"The Security Council reaffirms its profound attachment to the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as envisaged in the Road Map.

"The Security Council underlines that action by the international community cannot be a substitute for determined measures by the parties themselves.

"The Security Council encourages the parties to engage in direct negotiations.

"The Security Council reaffirms the vital role of the Quartet and looks forward to its continued active engagement.

"The Security Council reiterates the importance of, and the need to achieve, a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2006/51.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5585

Security Council

Distr.: General
12 December 2006

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 5585th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 12 December 2006, at 3 p.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 12 December 2006, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 5585th meeting in private with the troop-contributing countries to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire.

"The Security Council and the troop-contributing countries heard a briefing under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure by Mr. Pierre Schori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire."

06-65496 (E) 121206

United Nations S/PV.5586

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5586th meeting

Tuesday, 12 December 2006, 6.05 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Al-Bader	(Qatar)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Estremé
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Mr. Faaborg-Andersen
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Yankey
	Greece	Mrs. Telalian
	Japan	Mr. Endo
	Peru	Mr. Ruiz Rosas
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Ms. Halászová
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 1 December 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/933)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-65528 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 6.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 1 December 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/933)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Lebanon, in which she requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the representative of Lebanon to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Ziade (Lebanon) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I wish to draw the attention of members to document S/2006/933, which contains the text of a letter dated 1 December 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

Following consultations among members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council recalls all its previous resolutions on Lebanon, in particular resolutions 1701 (2006), 425 (1978), 426 (1978), 520 (1982), 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), as well as the statements of its President on the situation in Lebanon, in particular the statements of 30 October 2006 (S/PRST/2006/43) and of 21 November 2006 (S/PRST/2006/46).

"The Security Council reiterates its full support for the legitimate and democratically elected Government of Lebanon, calls for full respect for the democratic institutions of the country, in conformity with the constitution, and condemns any effort to destabilize Lebanon. The Security Council calls upon all Lebanese political parties to show responsibility with a view to preventing, through dialogue, further deterioration of the situation in Lebanon. It reaffirms its strong support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders and under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon. The Council reiterates its call upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Security Council for the full implementation of all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon.

"The Security Council welcomes the letter of the Secretary-General to the President of the Council of 1 December 2006 (S/2006/933), as well as his previous reports of 18 August 2006 (S/2006/670) and of 12 September 2006 (S/2006/730) on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

"The Security Council calls for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and urges all concerned parties to cooperate fully with the Security Council and the Secretary-General to achieve this goal.

"The Security Council welcomes the Secretary-General's indication of the continuing commitment of the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel to all aspects of the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). It urges both Governments to strictly abide by their commitment and to pursue their efforts to achieve a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution as envisioned in the resolution.

"The Security Council notes that important progress has been made towards the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), in particular through the cessation of hostilities, the imminent withdrawal of all the Israeli forces from

southern Lebanon and the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the south of the country for the first time in three decades, together with the deployment so far of more than 10,000 troops from the reinforced UNIFIL.

"The Security Council welcomes the maintenance of the cessation of hostilities since 14 August 2006, supports the work done by UNIFIL, together with the parties, to finalize the Israeli withdrawal from the remaining area inside Lebanon and set up temporary security arrangements for the part of the village of Ghajar inside Lebanese territory, positively notes the decision of the Israeli Cabinet in this regard, and looks forward to its early implementation.

"The Security Council commends the Lebanese Government for extending its authority throughout its territory, particularly in the south, and encourages it to continue its efforts in this regard, including through the reinforcement of its capacities along its borders and the exercise of its monopoly of the use of force all over its territory in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

"The Security Council reiterates its full support to UNIFIL and looks forward to the completion of its deployment early next year as contemplated by the Secretary-General in his letter. It expresses its strong appreciation to Member States who have contributed to UNIFIL in the past and since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006) and notes the establishment of the Strategic Military Cell dedicated to UNIFIL at United Nations Headquarters.

"The Security Council, while expressing deep concern at the continuing Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, appeals to all parties concerned to respect the cessation of hostilities and the Blue Line in its entirety, to refrain from any act of provocation and to abide scrupulously by their obligation to respect the safety of the UNIFIL and other United Nations personnel, including by avoiding any course of action which endangers United Nations personnel and by ensuring UNIFIL is accorded full freedom of movement throughout its area of operation.

"The Security Council, in this context, reiterates its deep concern at latest reports, though unverified, of illegal movements of arms into Lebanon. It welcomes the initial steps taken by the Government of Lebanon, notably the deployment of 8,000 troops along the border, to prevent movements of arms, in conformity with relevant resolutions, and reiterates its call upon the Government of Syria to take similar measures to reinforce controls at the border.

"The Security Council, mindful of the conclusions of the team of border police experts dispatched by the Secretary-General at the request of the Government of Lebanon, invites the Secretary-General to pursue further technical and independent assessment of the situation along the border and to report back to the Council on further findings and recommendations in this regard.

"The Council further invites Member States, as recommended by the Secretary-General, to consider possible bilateral assistance to the Government of Lebanon to enhance its border security capacities.

"The Council urges all Member States, in particular in the region, to take all necessary measures to implement in full paragraph 15 of resolution 1701 (2006), including the arms embargo, and expresses its intention to consider further steps to achieve the goals set out in that paragraph.

"The Security Council welcomes the concrete steps taken by the Government of Lebanon, with the assistance of UNIFIL, to establish between the Blue Line and the Litani river an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL and calls upon the Government of Lebanon to strengthen its efforts to this end. The Council also reiterates its call for the disbanding and disarmament of all militias and armed groups in Lebanon.

"The Security Council expresses deepest concern at the presence in very high numbers of unexploded ordnance in south Lebanon, including cluster munitions. It deplores the death and injury of dozens of civilians, as well as of several deminers, caused by those munitions since the cessation of hostilities. It welcomes the continued contribution of UNIFIL to operational mine

clearance, encourages further assistance in mine action by the United Nations to the Government of Lebanon in support of both the continued development of its national mine action capacity and clearance of the remaining mine/unexploded ordnance threat in the South, commends donor countries for supporting these efforts through financial and in-kind contributions and encourages further international contributions and practical cooperation.

"The Security Council reaffirms the urgent need for the unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers.

"The Security Council further encourages efforts aimed at urgently settling the issue of the Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel.

"The Security Council commends the efforts of the Secretary-General and his facilitator to this end and calls upon all parties concerned to support those efforts.

"Bearing in mind the relevant provisions of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), in particular on the delineation of the Syrian-Lebanese border, the Security Council takes note with interest of the appointment by the Secretary-General of a senior cartographer to review relevant material and develop an accurate territorial definition of the Shaba'a farms area.

"The Security Council notes with appreciation the process launched by the Secretary-General to investigate the cartographic, legal and political implications of the proposal contained in the seven-point plan of the Government of Lebanon and looks forward to its further recommendations on this issue early next year.

"The Security Council calls upon the international community urgently to provide the Government of Lebanon with financial assistance in support of the national early recovery and reconstruction process. It expresses its appreciation to the Member States, United Nations bodies and intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations that have provided and continue to provide assistance to the Lebanese people and Government, and looks forward to the success of the international Conference which will be held in Paris, on 25 January 2007, in support of Lebanon.

"The Security Council reaffirms its full support to the Secretary-General in his efforts and dedication to facilitate and assist in the fulfilment of all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) and requests the Secretary-General to report on a quarterly basis on the implementation of that resolution, notably on further progress made towards the achievement of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2006/52.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5587

Security Council

Distr.: General
13 December 2006

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 5587th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 13 December 2006, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 13 December 2006, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 55xxth meeting in private with the troop-contributing countries to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

"The Security Council and the troop-contributing countries heard a briefing under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure by Ms. Lisa Buttenheim, Director of the Asia and Middle East Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations."

06-65847 (E) 131206

United Nations S/PV.5588

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5588th meeting

Wednesday, 13 December 2006, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Al-Nasser	(Qatar)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Martínez Gramuglia
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Mr. Faaborg-Andersen
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Shinyo
	Peru	Mr. Orozco
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2006/906)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-65731 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2006/906)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Albania, Finland, Serbia and Ukraine, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Raskovic-Ivic (Serbia) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Joachim Rücker, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Rücker to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/906, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

I shall now give the floor to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Joachim Rücker.

Mr. Rücker: First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Council for your invitation here today to brief the Council on where we stand in Kosovo. I would also like to welcome the Council's invitation to Prime Minister Çeku to be present here today at this important discussion on Kosovo's future.

Status continues to dominate the agenda of everyone concerned with Kosovo. Of course, after more than seven years of international administration and of local capacity-building and after Kai Eide's finding that the status quo is not tenable, the timelines attached to the process are of particular importance. Anxiety has clearly risen, following the decision to delay the proposal on status until after the Serbian elections on 21 January. Keeping momentum in the status process will thereafter be a key factor in heading off a feeling of uncertainty regarding the way ahead, which would be a potential source of instability.

At the same time, important work on standards continues as a top priority of both the Kosovo Government and of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We sometimes have the impression from our international interlocutors that, with all the focus on the status process, the implementation of standards has been forgotten or pushed aside. That is not at all the case. Standards remain at the core of our daily work, with particular concentration on the 13 priority areas set by the Contact Group earlier this year, most of which have been fulfilled by the Kosovo Provisional Institutions.

The Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Çeku, has continued to demonstrate effective leadership on standards implementation, strengthening central and local government institutions and transitioning governance-building and reform to the longer-term platform of European integration through the European Partnership for Kosovo. The Assembly has passed and I have promulgated key legislation prioritized by the Contact Group, including a law firmly establishing the equal official status of the Albanian and Serbian language throughout Kosovo and laws on religious freedom and cultural heritage,

containing provisions of particular importance to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Kosovo Government has also undertaken steps to ensure freedom of movement by agreeing to take over the responsibility from UNMIK to operate the freedom of movement bus and train system.

One noteworthy area of progress has been the effort to create the conditions for returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This week, the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) will complete a six-month project in the village of Svinjare, near Mitrovica, to repair damage to homes and improve local infrastructure. That has been one of the largest and most high-profile projects undertaken by the KPC, and its successful completion demonstrates the KPC's ability and willingness to serve all the people of Kosovo. Despite the success of the project, the Kosovo Serb IDPs have still not returned to Svinjare. I appeal to Belgrade to encourage them to do so. Nonetheless, the criteria on which the Institutions of Self-Government should be judged are their actions to create the conditions for returns.

Another example: in Babus, another village, the keys to 83 reconstructed houses will be ready to be handed over on 20 December. However, the non-governmental organization implementing the project has raised serious concerns with UNMIK that most of the beneficiaries may not actually return. In short, good efforts will have limited impact if more is not done — particularly by Belgrade — to encourage returns when the conditions for them have been created.

The continuing calls by Belgrade for Kosovo Serbs to boycott Kosovo institutions have undermined work done by both UNMIK and the Institutions of Self-Government to reach out to minority communities and to end their often self-imposed isolation. The Serbian Government has still not withdrawn its directive to Kosovo Serbs to withdraw from the payroll of the Institutions of Self-Government, despite numerous calls to do so by the international community. I appeal to the representative of the Serbian Government to withdraw that directive.

One of the most frequently cited complaints of Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs is inadequate security to allow greater participation in political and social life in Kosovo. However, police statistics actually show a sharp drop in incidents that might be ethnically motivated, and we monitor them very carefully. While there have been serious incidents that attract wide public attention, this overall improvement in the situation merits greater recognition. Also, the Kosovo Police Service has made a concerted effort to improve overall security for minorities, as witnessed by the opening of police substations in minority areas and by active involvement by minority police officers in policing those areas. Moreover, the crime statistics in all reporting categories show that there is no disproportion regarding ethnicity with regard to crime. That said, we cannot be complacent about where we are. We continue to put a high priority on all incidents in which police suspect ethnic or political motives.

UNMIK has also been working intensively to address another important concern: the supply of electricity. The difficulties can be traced back to one core problem. The Kosovo electricity company (KEK), the energy provider in Kosovo, has inherited an infrastructure in a state of disrepair, and it does not have enough funds for repair and investment unless consumers pay for the electricity they use. We have recently had some success in improving the payment culture, but some consumers — including nearly all Kosovo Serbs — still do not pay and have significant debts. However, recent talks have been somewhat encouraging. We are now looking forward to a result where Kosovo Serbs are finally recognizing and paying KEK, which will enable it to upgrade the system for the benefit of all, starting this winter. In that context, it is also very important that Kosovo can effectively import additional amounts of electricity, if and when needed, through the Serbian transmission system.

Overall, much has been achieved this year on standards. But that does not mean that everything has been fulfilled. Continuous efforts are needed, as indicated by the challenges noted in the technical assessment of standards implementation that is before members. Progress on many of the standards also depends on clarity regarding status. We all know that progress in key areas such as returns is limited by the lingering uncertainty about Kosovo's future.

While the status process has clearly been brought a long way forward this year, momentum needs to be kept up and a timely status settlement achieved. The constructive engagement and unity of the Kosovo negotiating team — which includes opposition leaders — have contributed substantially to the progress made in the process so far. It is crucial that all stakeholders in Kosovo remain committed to the

process and continue to support the work of Special Envoy Ahtisaari.

The Contact Group has unambiguously stated that once the status process has begun, it cannot be blocked. Resolving Kosovo's status would benefit the entire Balkan region, including Belgrade. On the other hand, further delay would entail significant political and economic costs for Kosovo, for our neighbours, for the region as a whole and for the international community. Delay would be more than just a loss of time. Delay would raise tensions and play into the hands of extremists on all sides. And delay would not make a solution easier; it would make it much more difficult. No one can have an interest in such an outcome.

Once a status decision is made, UNMIK will need to provide for an orderly and smooth handover to future local and international institutions established under the status settlement. Early and prudent planning is indispensable in order to achieve that, and transition planning has now become one of our key priorities. We need to do as much as possible, without prejudice to the status process, before the formal transition period begins with the adoption of a resolution by the Council.

The transfer of responsibilities from UNMIK to the future local and international authorities will be a highly complex task. Let me mention just some of the elements required.

Kosovo will need a new constitutional arrangement to replace the constitutional framework, which relies on UNMIK. The adoption of a new constitution will naturally be followed by elections. The entire body of legislation promulgated by UNMIK will have to be reviewed and necessary amendments made so that, for example, references to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNMIK are replaced.

The future authorities will have to take over all executive functions for which UNMIK still has operational responsibility. New institutions, which may include new ministries, will also have to be created to perform new responsibilities. A wide variety of other tasks will need to be carried out after the end of UNMIK's mandate, such as the handover of our archives to the future authorities and the production and issuance of new travel documents and identification cards to replace the current UNMIK documents. Those tasks, as well as the implementation of the status settlement, will place substantial strains on the local authorities. The international community must support them in this endeavour.

It is also important that the future International Civilian Office, now being prepared by the European Union and the United States, will be fully operational when status comes. Let me reiterate once again: delay would not make a solution easier; it would make it much more difficult.

The United Nations has accomplished much in Kosovo. We now owe it to Kosovo and to you, the members of the Security Council, to make sure that this final phase of United Nations administration is wrapped up in an orderly and responsible manner. I trust that the Council will help in that endeavour by keeping the momentum in the status process and by seeing it through.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Rücker for his briefing.

I give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic, President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija.

Ms. Raskovic-Ivic (Serbia): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of December. It gives me particular pleasure today to address this body of the world Organization.

Proceeding from a notion that we all share — that the establishment of lasting peace and security is the goal to which all people of goodwill are committed — I would particularly like to emphasize the important role of the Security Council concerning Kosovo and Metohija. Its importance is especially great since many sovereign States view the recent developments in the western Balkans with increasing alarm, owing to certain unrealistic assessments with regard to the future status of Kosovo and Metohija.

Serbia is fully prepared to assume its share of responsibility in the process of successfully resolving of the question of Kosovo and Metohija, on the basis of international law and in line with universally acclaimed democratic values. We are fully confident that the Security Council will make a crucial contribution in the spirit of its previous documents, primarily resolution 1244 (1999) of 10 June 1999, which unambiguously reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country.

It is absolutely clear that only by the systematic, responsible and gradual management of the negotiations on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija will we be able to reach a long-term sustainable solution. Such a solution cannot be achieved in haste and should emerge only through confidence-building, dialogue and negotiations. Otherwise, new complications may arise. Confidence and dialogue are conditions sine qua non for any coexistence. Nervousness, haste and arrogance will not help. They will only drive us further from a solution. We have a saying: "Avoid shortcuts — they might be the wrong way".

However, I must regrettably inform the Council about the cruel reality in Kosovo and Metohija, which testifies to the lack of freedom and security there. From 15 August to 1 December 2006, 75 ethnically motivated attacks were committed, in which 23 persons of Serb nationality were injured. The extremists also targeted members of other communities. The house of Zecir Zurapi, a member of the ethnic Gorany community in the village of Gornja Rapca, was blown up on 1 October 2006. The perpetrators of that terrorist act, like so many others in the past, have not been identified. It is significant, however, that immediately before the attack, Zurapi was involved in plans to have the Gorany students educated in line with the Serbian curriculum. As a result, more than 1,000 students in three schools were not able to attend classes for more than 30 days.

Over the same period, in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, 17 transmitter stations belonging to the Serbian mobile operator Telekom Srbija were put out of operation. This is a virtual criminal act that is taking place before the very eyes of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), because, since 1997, Telekom Srbija has had a valid licence to operate throughout the entire territory of Serbia, and has paid all of its taxes to UNMIK and the Kosovo Provisional Government. That act has further isolated the Serbian population. It should also be pointed out that, in the context of all types of communications, UNMIK has consistently tried, to varying degrees, to extend its mandate, thus violating the sovereignty of Serbia. There are many examples of that in its activities related to the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Union of Railways, the International Committee for Railway Transport, the Universal Postal Union and the International Telecommunication Union. All of those activities are aimed at taking away attributes and symbols through international specialized organizations, thus prejudging the final status of Kosovo and Metohija. In that way, preconditions for cooperation and confidence are naturally further undermined.

Furthermore, there have been drastic and selective electricity cuts. Such discrimination reached its apogee in the Serbian communities of central Kosovo and the municipality of Strpce, where one hour of power supply is followed by 10 to 20 hours of blackouts. Add to that the fact that there have been 260 inter-ethnic incidents since 24 October 2005, in which all the victims were Serbs, and the trend becomes more than obvious.

Let me add another sombre detail: even with the assistance of UNMIK, we have not been able to make the Albanian side agree — at least at a declaratory level — to the need to rebuild the houses of Serbs from Badovac village who were expelled in the riots of March 2004. At that time, Serbian houses all over Kosovo were set on fire and destroyed. People were expelled, and some were killed.

As for the return of expelled and internally displaced persons, I would like to recall that, from 1999 to date, as many as 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have not been in a position to return to Kosovo and Metohija. According to our data, 2 per cent have returned; according to UNMIK, the figure is 5 per cent. Major demographic and migratory shifts have taken place in Kosovo and Metohija. The population in Pristina, the capital, has increased threefold, and it is currently estimated at 600,000. There are no more than some 100 Serbs in Pristina. Before 1999, there were about 40,000 Serbs in Pristina.

As far as Serbian religious monuments, cultural heritage and religious freedoms are concerned, Albanians pay lip service to their protection. Serbian shrines are in fact looted and desecrated on a daily basis. The church of the Holy Shroud in the village of Babin Most near Obilic and the church of Saint Petka in Gojbulja, in the municipality of Vucitrn, were broken into and ransacked. The orchards of the Devic monastery, in the village of Lausa in the municipality of Srbica, were completely destroyed, even though they were guarded by KFOR and the Kosovo

Protection Service police after having been set on fire in March 2004.

Illegal construction close to cultural sites within the proposed protected zones is rampant. At the end of September, large-scale construction was begun in the vicinity of the monument honouring the mediaeval Serbian Kosovo heroes in Gazimestan, near Pristina. During the same period, in the neighbourhood of the village of Velika Hoca — a village that has 13 churches dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth century — an industrial facility is being built. There are plans to build a large hotel close to Gorioc monastery. These so-called construction activities naturally give rise to serious concern, since they are being carried out in close proximity to religious and cultural sites, which, in the negotiations on the future status of the province, should be granted the status of protected zones where urbanization and industrial construction are not allowed.

Those activities are obviously a deliberate attempt to prevent the preservation of the cultural and environmental integrity of the sites. The Government of Serbia and all the members of the Contact Group are insisting on that, making the negotiations on cultural heritage one of their priorities.

It should also be pointed out that attempts are being made by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to revise history and to delete all traces of Serb existence in Kosovo and Metohija. One of the most flagrant instances of quasi-historical propaganda by the provisional Ministry of Culture of Kosovo took place in May 2005 in Paris. The Minister of Culture, Astrit Haracia, tried to distribute in the UNESCO building a pamphlet entitled *Monuments of Kosova*. The publication makes no mention whatsoever of the Serbian contribution to the heritage of Kosovo and Metohija. That publication outraged the participants and UNESCO officials. Its distribution was stopped by Søren Jessen-Petersen, who was head of UNMIK at the time, at the explicit request of our Minister for Foreign Affairs. Regrettably, the Provisional Ministry of Culture of Kosovo, even after that unfortunate incident a year and a half ago, has continued to promote more or less the same ideas in a different form. On its web site, www.visitkosova.org, a one-sided historical version is presented stating that Kosovo and Metohija has been exclusively the land of the Albanians since earliest history.

The role of UNMIK is, unfortunately, giving rise to concern. Although it is unambiguously defined in all documents as a United Nations transitional administration with a clear mandate, it often assumes the role of a condominium by seeking to create a State for Albanians. Almost as a rule, UNMIK has adopted a sympathetic attitude and ignored Albanian extremism.

I would like to recall that Ambassador Kai Eide, in his comprehensive review of the situation in Kosovo, emphasized that, along with the process of seeking a solution concerning the future status of Kosovo and Metohija, it is crucially important to continue with the standards implementation as the only way forward. Ambassador Eide also pointed out other very important and substantial problems. Unfortunately, for the time being, there are no serious signs that anyone is willing to recognize at least some of those perfectly adequate and constructive recommendations. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, said a fortnight ago that compromise was impossible and stupid. That statement cast a shadow on the constructive efforts being made, especially given that compromise is one of the important principles endorsed by the Contact Group at its meeting in January 2006.

Anyone can see that organized crime, human trafficking and corruption are rampant in Kosovo and Metohija. The drug and arms trade and smuggling provide a lifeline for the criminal and terrorist business, before the very eyes of the international community, the police and the military. Mafia-style Albanian clans are currently flourishing. The most recent and alarming incident occurred 10 days ago, when an Albanian terrorist paramilitary formation in Kosovo and Metohija began to intercept vehicles, asking for identification papers and intimidating passengers. Also, several days ago, on 8 December, barely a few minutes before a train was scheduled to arrive, unidentified terrorists blew up railway tracks in the vicinity of Mijalic village, in the municipality of Vucitrn. The only passengers in the train were Serbs, who travel regularly from Priluzje, Plemetine and Zvecan on this line. The blowing up of the tracks was yet another horrific terrorist attack against the Serbs.

Difficult as it may be, the situation and the events in Kosovo and Metohija should be looked at in a realistic, responsible and objective fashion. Any precipitous solution would cost the region, the province itself and the international community dearly;

instead of achieving a sustainable solution, they would have to deal with an even more difficult and complex situation in Kosovo and Metohija. A hasty solution would set a precedent that would open up a Pandora's box.

I must emphasize once again here that the entire strategy adopted by the Albanian side in the past actually boils down to not engaging in the status negotiations. The Kosovo Albanians are idly waiting to be given yet another Albanian State in the Balkans within the internationally recognized borders of Serbia. From the point of view of the interests of the international community at large, such an outcome is unacceptable; we cannot but take into account the facts.

I would like to stress that the solution has to be a compromise reached in the interests of peace and lasting stability. It has to be sought, on an agreed basis, by the two negotiating parties — Serbian and Albanian. Belgrade, the Government of Serbia and the Serbs of Kosovo in particular are seeking to reach an agreement that guarantees a durable solution with respect to their coexistence in a modern, democratic and decentralized State.

The Serbian side therefore sees the solution to the Kosovo problem as based on the implementation of the principles and specific solutions contained in the platform of the Serbian negotiating team on the future status of Kosovo and Metohija. It remains the best way to resolve the current horrific situation in the province. A different outcome would create unlawfulness, and unlawfulness breeds more unlawfulness.

The international community should support, and demonstrate such support by its deeds, its commitment to a stable and safe region. That can be achieved only by taking steps to introduce the rule of law, punish criminals and terrorists, and create the security and other conditions necessary to a normal and dignified life. A life of dignity is not only defined by the fundamental documents of international law, but is also embodied in European standards recognizing the respect of human rights and freedoms.

Of course, my country relies primarily on the law — domestic law, international law, democratic principles, agreements and treaties — but first and foremost on the inviolable principle of justice. We firmly believe that there is a way out of this situation. A sustainable solution can be based only on giving up extreme demands and embracing a rational approach and compromise. In practice, that means substantial autonomy for Kosovo — the kind of autonomy that no European or other State has granted to their region so far. It is there that, despite the obvious difficulties, there is manoeuvring space for agreement and compromise. There is manoeuvring space to find a solution. The talks held so far have not borne fruit, largely due to the lack of engagement and the insufficient number of meetings. We propose that the Vienna talks be immediately resumed in order to define modalities for the broadest possible autonomy of Kosovo Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija, with the participation of the European Union. The talks should be intensive so as to enable us to obtain results soon.

The threat of violence that is being heard more or less openly from the Albanian side cannot be accepted as a rational argument. Perhaps today violence is a consequence of a conjuncture, but a conjuncture is a variable. Constants are always better than variables, and, in this instance, a constant means dialogue, compromise and rejection of the use of violence.

Serbia voiced its position on Kosovo and Metohija just a month and a half ago in a fully legitimate and very powerful fashion. More than half of registered voters with the right to vote opted in favour of the new Constitution of Serbia. Its preamble incorporates the fundamental principles of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). That constitutional provision has been practically based on the Charter of the United Nations, on which this body which I have the honour to address today is also based. By adopting the Constitution of their country in a referendum, an absolute majority of the citizens of Serbia reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of the inviolability of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of democratic States and to the inviolability of the borders of the Republic of Serbia, and thus to the United Nations and the Security Council.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to thank the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Joachim Rücker, for his briefing. I should like also welcome the presence among us of Ms. Raskovic-Ivic, President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, and of Mr. Çeku, Prime Minister of Kosovo, as part of the delegation led by Mr. Rücker.

The representative of Finland will make a statement later on behalf of the presidency of the European Union, with which I fully align myself.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2006/906) stresses the sustained progress that has been made in standards implementation, in line with the calls of Council members. This is the case, in particular, with regard to the priorities identified by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Contact Group with respect to the protection of minorities and the rule of law.

We note with satisfaction the adoption of a number of laws intended to ensure the protection of minorities. This is necessary to affirm Kosovo's multi-ethnic character. This is a positive development, but it needs to be built upon. All the standards must be implemented tangibly and rapidly, in particular with respect to property rights and the rule of law, and especially regarding the judicial sector.

We also note the drop in ethnic-based crimes. Nevertheless, such acts continue to be unacceptable; beyond the necessary condemnation in words, they must also be dealt with appropriately through the legal system.

The report of the Secretary-General stresses the efforts being made by the provisional authorities to establish contacts with minority communities; it is thus all the more disappointing that Serb leaders in Kosovo continue to remain outside the political process, which is to the detriment of their community. The Belgrade authorities should remove all obstacles preventing Kosovo Serbs from participating in the Provisional Institutions.

My delegation reiterates its full support for the negotiating process being led by Mr. Ahtisaari. We note with regret that the positions of the parties, as the Secretary-General's report observes, remain far apart. We have taken note of the Special Envoy's announcement that his recommendations will be submitted after the parliamentary elections in Serbia. The Security Council should then take decisions on the basis of those recommendations, including on adopting the international presence in Kosovo.

It is important not to delay the resolution of an issue that weighs on regional stability and impedes the implementation of the reforms that we all wish to see. The ultimate solution, which must be acceptable to the majority of the population in Kosovo, should also respect the guidelines that were established by the Contact Group and endorsed by the Security Council.

Mrs. Martínez Gramuglia (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Joachim Rücker, for his briefing and his comments on the latest developments in Kosovo. We welcome the President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic. We also welcome Prime Minister Çeku as part of the delegation of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Let me also echo the gratitude expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2006/906) to the men and women of UNMIK for their steadfastness and their commitment to the values and principles of the Organization as they carry out their daily tasks. Argentina has been participating in UNMIK with police, military and diplomatic personnel since the very beginning of the Mission, and we will continue to support its work in its upcoming phases as well.

The report gives an account, once again, of sustained progress on standards implementation, with special emphasis on the 13 priorities identified by the Contact Group last June. We would like to underline the willingness of the Provisional Institutions to implement the standards programme. Without any doubt, this contributes to strengthening the Kosovo Institutions. Standards implementation is also a sine qua non condition for making Kosovo's European perspective a reality, and it must continue to be the core of the efforts throughout the future status process for Kosovo, and even beyond.

However, it is disappointing that the positive effects of implementation do not fully benefit the Kosovo Serb community, due primarily to their own reluctance to cooperate with the Pristina authorities. We urge the Kosovo Serb community to act with the maturity necessary to assume their responsibilities in a truly multi-ethnic society. The leaders of the Serb National Council must end their boycott of contacts with the Provisional Institutions, while Belgrade must remove without delay all impediments to such participation.

For their part, the leaders of the Provisional Institutions must persist vigorously with standards implementation if they are to accomplish the aim of

laying the foundation of a multi-ethnic and democratic society in which all communities live in dignity and security. All groups that compose Kosovo's society must display wisdom at this critical moment for the future of Kosovo, and their leaders must seize this opportunity to promote reconciliation and dialogue.

Mr. Rücker has indicated that the political situation in Kosovo is dominated by the future status process. It is undeniable that there are differing expectations regarding the outcome, but we believe that it is necessary to maintain the momentum in the process under way, because uncertainty could result in greater instability. On the contrary, the primary aim of this process should be to ensure that all those who live in Kosovo can have a safe, decent, peaceful and dignified life.

To achieve this, it is essential that any agreed approach be based on negotiations between the parties, and not something imposed internationally. This, in our view, is the basis for any sustainable agreement and we believe that it should be a priority for the international community. Any solution must contribute to regional stability, with a realistic, viable, sustainable agreement that is in full compliance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). It must also be based on and consistent with the Guiding Principles for the settlement of Kosovo's status, formulated by the Contact Group and endorsed by the Security Council — in particular, full respect for the territorial integrity and internal stability of regional neighbours.

Argentina considers that there can be no prosperous and peaceful future for Kosovo without complete respect for the diversity of its people. It is key to stability and to social and economic development, both in Kosovo and in the entire region, that the status process concludes satisfactorily, with an outcome that is acceptable to the majority and at the same time respects and protects the rights of minorities.

We call on the leaders of both parties, who have a historic opportunity in their hands, to demonstrate the vision and the political will to achieve a settlement that will enable Kosovo to enter a new phase of its history and will enable the international community to continue to support a sustainable solution for the Kosovo issue in full respect for the principle of territorial integrity.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): The United States joins in welcoming to the Council Special Representative Rücker, Prime Minister Çeku and Ms. Raskovic-Ivic.

The United States continues to support the role the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is playing in developing meaningful self-government in Kosovo, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). We appreciate the leadership of Mr. Rücker and the work he is doing to prepare Kosovo for its future political status.

The United States is encouraged by the progress Kosovo is making in implementing the Contact Group's standards priorities. Kosovo should make every effort, with the full support of UNMIK, to complete all of the priorities and to continue work on the overall standards for Kosovo, paying particular attention to respecting individual property rights.

We strongly condemn the 8 December explosion of a railway line in the municipality of Vushtrri and note with concern reports of illegal checkpoints being established in western Kosovo. We call upon all sides to refrain from violence and to respect the rule of law. Individuals responsible for the 8 December explosion and other violent incidents should be brought to justice. Belgrade must also do its part to help improve the situation in Kosovo by supporting Kosovo Serb participation in local institutions, returning cadastral records taken from Kosovo and working with the international community to ensure stability, particularly in northern Kosovo.

Six and a half years have passed since international community intervention brought an end to the fighting in Kosovo. The people of Kosovo — all the people of Kosovo — deserve clarity about their future. As the Secretary-General notes in his recent report on Kosovo, the mere speculation about delay in the status process has led to a feeling of uncertainty as to the way ahead and could represent a source of instability if momentum abates. We agree with the Secretary-General's assessment that it is important to keep the momentum in the political process and achieve a status settlement soon.

We thank President Ahtisaari for his leadership of the Kosovo status talks. The United States supports President Ahtisaari's decision to present his report without delay to the parties following the 21 January

elections in Serbia. To that end, we ask both Belgrade and Pristina to receive President Ahtisaari's report with open minds, a willingness to be flexible on the many issues under discussion, and an understanding of the importance of reaching a settlement that helps accelerate that region's Euro-Atlantic integration.

As the United Nations-led status process enters its concluding stages, both sides must be realistic about the probable outcome. As the Contact Group has stated, there will be no return of Kosovo to the pre-1999 situation, no partition of Kosovo, and no union of Kosovo with any other or part of another country. Additionally, the settlement must solidify Kosovo's multi-ethnicity and must also offer real protection for the political and cultural rights of all communities in Kosovo. At the same time, the settlement must be acceptable to the people of Kosovo.

Finally, it is important for UNMIK, as well as the Pristina and Belgrade authorities, to work closely with the representatives of NATO, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and others in the international community on the transition planning needed for the period following the conclusion of the status process.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): At the outset, allow me to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Rücker for his briefing. I would also like to thank Ms. Raskovic-Ivic, President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, and welcome the presence of the Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo, Mr. Çeku, at this meeting.

While a form for the final status of Kosovo dominates the political situation in Kosovo, the implementation of the Kosovo standards is the challenge which the leaders of Kosovo must address on a day-to-day basis. Since the standards include some important elements which provide the foundation for governance based on democracy and the rule of law, Japan would like to reaffirm the importance of continued implementation efforts by the future Government in Kosovo, regardless of the final status.

In that regard, we welcome the steady progress on the implementation of 13 priority areas, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General. In addition, we appreciate the creation of structures and work plans by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to implement the European Partnership Action Plan, in which the standards are now integrally incorporated. Those efforts can be regarded as evidence of Kosovo's commitment to the continuing implementation of the standards in the future.

Needless to say, serious work should go into all standards implementation efforts. However, I would like to mention the following three points that require particular attention in light of the anticipated situation following the settlement of the final status.

First, with regard to functioning democratic institutions, it is a serious problem that no progress has been reported on the issue of participation of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo's political institutions. We express our deep concern, in particular, with regard to the three northern municipalities' ongoing boycott of contacts with the Provisional Institutions, and urge those municipalities once again to resume their contacts without delay. To solve that problem, the Government of Serbia, as a responsible member of the international community, should respond positively to the international calls for action on that issue.

Secondly, with regard to the economy, a stable society will not be achieved through the stabilization of governance alone, but also requires economic recovery. The economy of Kosovo is hardly self-sufficient. The Provisional Institutions need to redouble their efforts to build the necessary economic system and institutions, and also to address the issue of youth unemployment, which some say exceeds 60 per cent. In addition, special attention should be given to creating job opportunities for returnees and minority groups.

Thirdly, with regard to the freedom of movement, the mistrust among ethnic groups, especially the fear among the Kosovo Serbs and other minority populations with regard to the majority population, is an underlying factor that is hindering freedom of movement. Serbian and Albanian leaders alike therefore need to take the necessary measures for confidence-building among the people. That issue, together with the aforementioned problem of insufficient job opportunities, constitutes an obstacle to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. For that reason, we call for prompt measures in that regard.

I would also like to make several points concerning the efforts of the international community towards determination of the final status of Kosovo. First, Japan has been fully supporting the efforts of

Special Envoy Mr. Ahtisaari and, in that context, we express our understanding of his decision to present his comprehensive proposal immediately after the upcoming Serbian elections. Secondly, we welcome the careful preparations now under way for the transition to an international civilian presence after the withdrawal of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) under the leadership of UNMIK and the European Union. The transition needs to take place without any delay upon the determination of the final status.

Before concluding my remarks today, I would like to send an important message to all parties. While the situation in Kosovo will reach a critical juncture at the beginning of next year, we would like to strongly urge all parties to act with the utmost prudence to ensure that the final status will contribute to peace and security in the region.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the participation at today's meeting of the Security Council of Ms. Raskovic-Ivic, President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, and thank her for her substantive statement.

We listened carefully to the statement made by Mr. Rücker, head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which would have benefited had Mr. Rücker not exceeded his mandate and had he properly complied with the modalities of today's meeting with regard to his accompanying delegation.

We take note of the Secretary-General's report. Despite a few positive advances, the achievements in implementing the standards established by the international community with respect to ethnic minorities cannot yet be described as significant. In particular, the problem of protecting the religious and cultural heritage of minorities, decentralization, the return of non-Albanian refugees and many other issues are still far from having been resolved.

We commend the enhanced legal basis aimed at guaranteeing the rights of the non-Albanian population in Kosovo. Nevertheless, the key problem is still the same: the growing gap between the existence of relevant documents and the actual situation in the province. Unfortunately, it must be said that, at this stage, the pledges to guarantee the rights and security of non-Albanians in Kosovo have not yet been implemented. In that connection, we should recall the conclusion of the Secretary-General that, in order to ensure confidence-building and stability, it is important to guarantee that priority be placed not on symbolic but on concrete measures.

There must be more attention given to the property rights of non-Albanians, including Orthodox churches, during the privatization process in Kosovo. Any mistakes in that regard could well eventually lead to the establishment of a single ethnic society in Kosovo.

A precondition for progress in the standards programme is to enhance security and to combat organized crime. Without that, freedom of movement, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and economic recovery will be impossible.

We are concerned that, despite the decrease in the overall number in ethnically motivated crimes, acts of violence against the security of Kosovo's Serbs continue.

The periodically heard threats that there will be mass unrest in Kosovo if a decision on status is not taken by a given date are also a subject of concern. We can only interpret that as unacceptable blackmail of the international community or as an attempt by radicals to incite acts of violence.

We strongly condemn the organization of mass unrest in Kosovo on 28 November, which included acts of violence against the UNMIK office in Pristina. We believe that the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo and the international presence will keep the situation under control. They must not allow a repetition of such events in the future.

We share the view of the Secretary-General as regards the unacceptability of allowing political events or the timetable to be determined by the street. We are convinced that any measures to destabilize or stir up the situation in the province would force the Security Council to review the situation, which could lead to an immediate halt of the future status process.

As was highlighted in particular during the recent meeting in Moscow with the UNMIK delegation and Mr. Çeku, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, the Kosovo Albanian leadership has the primary responsibility for not allowing extremist acts on the territory of the province that can only lead to complicating the settlement process. We strongly appeal to the leaders in

the province to decisively intensify their efforts to ensure genuine and lasting progress in the implementation of the standards, in particular those essential for ensuring a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo.

The Serbian side must, of course, play its part in that regard. We understand that the Secretary-General is disappointed with the non-participation of Kosovo Serbs in the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. At the same time, it does demonstrate that the confidence of minorities in the Institutions continues to be very low. The majority community should establish a climate conducive to encouraging minorities, and Kosovo Serbs in particular, to cooperate with provincial authorities and participate in all areas of life in Kosovo.

Achieving tangible and effective progress in the standards programme is one of the determining factors that will influence the rate and outcome of the negotiating process on the future status of Kosovo under the mediation of Mr. Ahtisaari, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.

We welcome the wise decision to suspend the status talks until the completion of the elections in Serbia. At this sensitive phase in defining the future status of Kosovo, it is extremely important to ensure consistent efforts by Belgrade and Pristina to find an effective and mutually acceptable negotiated outcome and to sustain international efforts to assist in achieving that outcome, on the basis of the fundamental principles set out in resolution 1244 (1999) and the Contact Group's documents.

The Secretary-General has rightly pointed out the need for both parties to show more flexibility and willingness to compromise in the negotiating process. They are called upon to find areas of agreement and to take long-lasting and sustainable decisions. We believe that that should be the focus of the comprehensive status proposal that the Special Envoy will eventually submit to the parties. We expect measures that will return the future status process to its earlier basis on internationally agreed principles, which are the only possible way to resolve the situation in Kosovo. In the first place, that concerns the need to give priority to negotiations and a rejection of strict timelines that are not motivated by the effort to gradually harmonize the positions of the Kosovo Serbs and Albanians. We must bring the parties back to negotiations, while taking into account the interests of both Belgrade and Pristina and not twist anyone's arms. We need to look more carefully at the concrete proposals coming from Belgrade, which demonstrate an attempt by Serbs to participate in the negotiating process.

We see no alternative to a negotiated compromise, however difficult it may be difficult to achieve. That is what is most important now. Condemnation of Belgrade for not showing a constructive approach or for having prejudged the status of Kosovo is unfounded. We also wish to align ourselves with the appeal by the Secretary-General on all parties to refrain from any unilateral acts or statements.

In any case, the decision on the future status of the province will have a universal character. Only a negotiated decision, rather than a unilateral or imposed one, regarding Kosovo can be supported by the Security Council and would avoid setting a negative precedent in the context of internal crisis resolution.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): We too welcome the participation of Special Representative Rücker, Prime Minister Çeku and Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic in today's debate regarding the future status of Kosovo.

It is indeed the desire of the delegation of Ghana to be a part of the consensus that will finally emerge in the Security Council on the future of Kosovo. Nonetheless, we recognize that this remains an exceedingly complex issue, given the wide gulf that persists between the parties. The dilemma is how to resolve the claim to self-determination by the majority Albanian population of Kosovo, on the one hand, and the Serbian Government's anxiety to preserve the territorial integrity of the Serbian State, on the other, as reflected in the provisions of the new Constitution, adopted in October this year.

In that regard, let me state that Ghana attaches equal weight to the two conflicting claims, and believes that all possibilities for a negotiated settlement of the current impasse must be explored, in conformity with the principles of international law. In addition, we are mindful of the fact that there can be no lasting peace and stability in Kosovo unless the final status process results in an outcome that guarantees respect for the rights of all ethnic groups in Kosovo and also encourages their effective and meaningful participation in public affairs within a democratic dispensation.

We believe the current strategy contains the right elements, with its emphasis on the creation of functioning democratic institutions that can effectively entrench the rule of law, ensure the freedom of movement in a safe and secure environment and facilitate the return of displaced persons, not to mention the creation of a vibrant economy for the well-being of the people of Kosovo. We are encouraged in that regard by the actions undertaken by UNMIK and the Office of the Special Envoy during the reporting period, both to meet the institutional needs of Kosovo and to engage the parties on the issues of decentralization, cultural and religious heritage and community rights.

Although the progress made so far does not measure up to expectations with respect to the 13 priorities for standards implementation, it is not for want of trying. In the absence of a strong political will to engage their Albanian counterparts, the Kosovo Serbians have impeded progress.

In that connection, the continuing refusal of the Serbian minority to participate in the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government — in spite of the various overtures made by the Government, coupled with the institutional mechanisms being put in place to ensure accountability and respect for the rights of all minorities — is a major challenge. We urge the Kosovo Serbs and the authorities in Belgrade not to dismiss those positive overtures as cynical manipulations of the final status process without subjecting them to a practical test. And the only way to do so is to become involved in the process of institution-building that is shaping the future of their homeland.

At the same time, we find the pattern of hostility among Albanian youth towards the Serbs particularly disturbing, as it does not augur well for harmonious existence between the two communities in future. We urge that conscious efforts be made to instil in the youth of the various ethnic groups the values of tolerance and unity. Otherwise, the current efforts will indeed amount to nothing but token gestures.

For us, therefore, the critical question today is whether at this point in time Kosovo has the internal strength and resilience to withstand the pressures of the conflicting claims on its future status. And closely related to that is whether the authorities in Belgrade and the Kosovo Serbs can be brought around to accepting an independent and sovereign Kosovo with the levers of power firmly in the hands of an Albanian majority. Ghana does not have easy answers to those questions.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): I join others in welcoming the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Joachim Rücker, and thank him for his presentation. I welcome the presence of the President of the Coordinating Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic, and I also welcome Prime Minister Çeku's presence among the delegation of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

Greece associates itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

Greece welcomes the progress made in the implementation of the standards, in particular of the Contact Group's 13 priorities for standards implementation, and stresses the need for the continued commitment of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in that regard. The effective fulfilment of the standards, which should by no means be limited to the 13 points mentioned above, is central in achieving a sustainable multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo, living in peace and stability.

The recent adoption of legislation such as the laws on freedom of religion, the use of languages and cultural heritage is a significant development, and we look very much forward to their full implementation.

Progress made in the functioning of the Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs marks positive steps. We emphasize that the prevalence of the rule of law is key to a working democracy. However, we note that there seems to be no substantial progress on decentralization beyond the first three pilot projects, although originally there were supposed to be five, and we call on all parties involved to take the process forward.

We fully support the principled stance of the Secretary-General with regard to the strong condemnation of violence. We express our concern with regard to the recent explosions on railway tracks in central Kosovo and reports on the setting up of checkpoints by masked gunmen. We note that attacks against religious sites have decreased and reiterate that such incidents should have no place whatsoever in a modern and democratic society.

Positive developments have marked the economic sector as well, aiming at attracting foreign investment and establishing the Central Banking Authority of Kosovo. We understand that Belgrade made an offer on the provision of electricity and that currently UNMIK and Belgrade are very close to agreeing on how that offer could be accepted. We would appreciate further information on those talks, as we very strongly support any initiative that improves the everyday life of the population of Kosovo.

As the Secretary-General also mentioned in his report, concerns still remain with regard to the low number of minority returns. The limited results cannot be attributed solely to the lack of economic opportunity. We cannot ignore the fact that the perception, or the reality, of security and freedom of movement remains the elementary factor that determines progress in that area.

We cannot but stress once more the need for the involvement of the Kosovo Serbs and the importance of their engagement with the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. The participation of the Kosovo Serbs in those Institutions is key in serving their own best interests, and we therefore urge Belgrade to encourage them in that direction.

Finally, with reference to the political process for the determination of Kosovo's future status, I would like to reiterate my country's position that the best possible and most sustainable outcome of the future status process is a mutually acceptable solution. We therefore welcome the fact that the international community has realized the need for a certain flexibility in the timeframe that allows for a more genuine status process and gives the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, among others, the necessary time to press on with their efforts on standards implementation.

Mr. Manongi (United Republic of Tanzania): We too welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Joachim Rücker, and thank him for his presentation. We also welcome the representative of Serbia, Ms. Raskovic-Ivic, and to thank her as well.

We wish to commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for their continued support and assistance in the implementation of standards in Kosovo and for their efforts to find a solution to the problems in that country.

We welcome the progress made by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo in their sustained effort to implement the 13 priority points for standards implementation presented by the Contact Group. We note from the report of the Secretary-General that substantial progress has been made in that regard. We also commend the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo for the steps they are taking to strengthen democratic institutions and promote the rule of law in Kosovo.

While we hail the progress in the implementation of standards, we regret that the issue of the future status of Kosovo remains in abeyance. Undoubtedly that has taken more prominence and visibility in the political life of Kosovo. Nevertheless, we commend the Special Envoy, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, for all his efforts in convening further rounds of direct talks between Belgrade and Pristina. We are, however, concerned that the positions of the two parties still remain far apart. We are mindful of the caution given by the Secretary-General in the report concerning the impact of the failure to bridge the differences between the two sides. We are troubled by the risk that further delay could potentially raise instability in that country.

We therefore reiterate our call to the leaders of both sides to negotiate in good faith. We appeal to the Serbian side to encourage Kosovo Serbs to participate in political institutions and to the Kosovo leaders to reach out to the Serbs and other minorities. We also urge them to refrain from any public pronouncements and unilateral decisions that may be construed by the other side as being hostile and provocative. Continued violence that seeks to effect political change is unhelpful and can only serve to undermine the peace process.

Since we are about to conclude our term in the Council, we shall not be members when the Special Envoy is expected to present his recommendations next March. However, we believe that it is in the interest of all the people of Kosovo that they and their leaders use the opportunity between now and March to promote reconciliation and dialogue. We urge them to accept and support the recommendations of the Special Envoy when they are presented.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): Allow me also to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Rücker for his

briefing today. On behalf of my delegation, I would also like to thank Madam Raskovic-Ivic, President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija for her statement. We too welcome the presence at the meeting of the Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo, Mr. Çeku, as a member of the delegation of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

My delegation aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered later this afternoon by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. That is why I will limit myself to the following comments.

In general, we share the positive evaluation of the developments in Kosovo since the launch of the status process, as presented in the latest report of Secretary-General (S/2006/906). We would like to join the Secretary-General's call to the majority of the population in Kosovo and to Kosovo's official representatives to sustain this strength and to demonstrate political responsibility, maturity and a firm dedication to the non-use of violence in achieving political change in Kosovo and in defining its status. We call on the Kosovo authorities to take all appropriate measures to guarantee security for all citizens and to address the issue of impunity.

Without thorough investigation of crimes and bringing perpetrators to justice, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation among communities in Kosovo, in our view, cannot be possible. We believe that is a matter of critical importance — especially when the UNMIK transition period is most likely ahead — that the authority of an international presence, whether it be the present or possibly a future one, is not undermined by any unreasonable actions or provocations.

The role of UNMIK, the Kosovo Force and other international bodies and organizations in Kosovo is still vital for and instrumental in the peace and stability of the region and the outcome of the status process and its implementation. We believe that the international presence will also have to be sustained in Kosovo after status determination.

We agree with Mr. Rücker that the implementation of standards must remain an important priority. We note with satisfaction the generally positive trends and the commitment of the Government led by Mr. Çeku to continue its efforts in that direction. It is of crucial importance to ensure that these efforts are maintained and remain sustainable, with special focus on the 13 priorities identified by the Contact Group.

I would like to reiterate that standards implementation is equally essential for securing the multi-ethnic and democratic nature of Kosovo as well as for its European perspective. The European Union is expected to play a more visible and decisive role in the next stage of the status process, so the more standards Kosovo can meet today, the further it can go in the future in terms of the integration processes, regardless of the dynamic of the status process.

Multi-ethnicity in practice means that Kosovo is also a homeland for Serbs. In this regard, we agree with the Secretary-General that progress will be achieved by demonstrating through actions, not words, that everyone has a future in Kosovo. In our view, it is the ultimate responsibility of the Kosovo Albanian majority to demonstrate through the adoption of adequate measures that it is ready to accept responsibility for the future well-being and security of Serbs and other ethnic minorities in Kosovo. The Serbian community in Kosovo should feel that it is an integral and welcome part of society as a whole and that its social and economic status will be acknowledged and honoured once the status implementation process is under way.

On the other hand, we believe that the issue of the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the Provisional Institutions should be separated from the status process. In this connection, we would also like to reiterate the call on Belgrade and Pristina to allow and encourage Kosovo Serbs to exercise their rights fully through their participation in the Institutions. We believe that will also positively contribute to the status negotiation process.

In conclusion, we reiterate that we support the process led by Mr. Ahtisaari and continue to believe it is necessary to find a lasting and balanced settlement as its outcome. It should be the highest priority and imperative to seek a balanced settlement and compromise from both sides through interactive talks that would, at the end of the day, reflect the objective concerns of all parties involved and strengthen regional security and stability.

Finally, we would like to stress that, in any outcome of the status definition process, Kosovars and

Serbs will have to live together, side by side. It is in their vital interest to find the best and most sustainable form of peaceful coexistence and cooperation that reflects their rightful ambitions and concerns.

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation also welcomes the representative of Serbia and the Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions in Kosovo.

In appointing Mr. Ahtisaari to lead the negotiations on the status of Kosovo, the Secretary-General, with the support of the Security Council and international community, sought to establish a political process that would eventually lead Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo to live together within a multi-ethnic society.

Aware of what is at stake here, given the stability of the whole region, Congo associated itself with the Contact Group's appeal to complete negotiations by the end of 2006. Today, in the light of the comments made by the Secretary-General and with the additional information provided by Mr. Rücker, it has to be noted that we are at a crossroads after seven years of interim administration and provisional status. Action without delay appears to be an urgent necessity.

We await with great interest the submission of the settlement proposal, which Mr. Ahtisaari had to defer on 10 November in order to take into account the parliamentary elections planned by Belgrade for 21 January. In the light of the situation described in the Secretary-General's report, it is important not to delay this process any further as that would lead to obvious risks, including the resurgence of violence carried out by armed groups whose only objective is to exploit potential frustrations.

At a time when we have every reason to believe that we are close to the finish line, the Security Council must express forcefully its condemnation of any unilateral act or any threat or use of violence that could undermine the political process that Mr. Ahtisaari has led with much effort. We should also deplore the fact that the Serb leaders in Kosovo have chosen to remain on the sidelines of the political process by being absent from the workings of the Provisional Institutions in Kosovo. As stressed by the Secretary-General, whatever the outcome of the settlement of Kosovo's future status, Serbs and Albanians must find common solutions to the problems that they share, which arise in relation to services that must be provided to all, without distinction.

The report cites the limited progress in the talks, caused by the apparently irreconcilable positions of the two parties. We express once again our full confidence in Mr. Ahtisaari and hope that he will be able to propose a settlement that will meet the international community's expectations.

Apart from these meagre results, it is encouraging to note the positive impact that the question of status has had on the other phase of the political process: the implementation of the standards. At the initiative of the Government of Kosovo, supported by UNMIK — which we commend for its tireless efforts — some positive progress has been made in areas essential for the reconciliation of communities and the establishment of a multi-ethnic society. That progress concerns in particular the 13 priorities defined by UNMIK and the Contact Group.

The establishment of pilot municipal units will help to limit the deep division between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and will eventually promote the development that we all hope for: seeing Kosovo's Serbs and Albanians living together with respect for their diversity and mindful of the protection of minority rights.

So it is up to the parties and their various communities to shoulder their responsibilities in this final stage. Ultimately, whatever the political settlement that is achieved, international support will be necessary to ensure the viability of the process.

Mr. Orozco (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, like previous speakers, I wish to thank Mr. Joachim Rücker, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for presenting the report on the work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) between 15 August and 31 October 2006. I also thank Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic, President of the Coordinating Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, for her presentation. In addition, I welcome the presence of Mr. Agim Çeku, Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2006/906), which objectively describes the developments in the Kosovo process during the period I have indicated, presents us with important elements for consideration

in the definition of Kosovo's status. On behalf of my delegation, I wish to highlight some positive developments that have occurred on the ground. Despite the difficulties that are still perceived, those developments should be encouraged so as to provide constructive support for the Kosovo process.

First, the effort made in 2006 by the Government of Kosovo to implement the standards — particularly the 13 priorities identified by the Contact Group — has been commendable. As the Secretary-General's report indicates, the progress made in standards implementation strengthens Kosovo's institutions and helps lay the groundwork for future development.

It is also relevant that, in this most recent period, some significant events have taken place in the economic sphere. I am referring in particular to the progress made in developing mining and the power generation associated with it, in addition to the rehabilitation of a number of power generation facilities. The international investors' conference for Kosovo, held on 10 and 11 October, was also an important step in attracting foreign investment.

As my delegations has stated on a number of occasions, any political settlement that determines Kosovo's status will be viable only if long-term socio-economic stability is achieved. In that connection, we urge Kosovo's economic actors to continue in the effort to get its productive sectors working and to ensure Kosovo's effective integration into its regional environment.

Furthermore, it cannot be denied that there are still barriers in Kosovo that are difficult to overcome. The process related to future status is a dominant factor in political life, as stated by Mr. Rücker. The feeling of uncertainty helps to create instability. The parties continue to express opposing positions that leave little room for negotiation. That situation does not help to create an appropriate context for reconciling all social sectors and improving the conditions for reaching a final settlement.

The Secretary-General indicated in his report that incidents of violence involving Kosovo Serbs have continued. It is also worrisome that Serb participation in the main political institutions continues to be practically non-existent. Likewise, according to the figures provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, while the number of minorities returning to Kosovo has remained constant, it is still unsatisfactory.

The definition of Kosovo's future status must be inclusive and not exclude any of the sectors that make up society. In other words, the building of a multi-ethnic society requires active participation by all sectors involved. Without such a consensus, it will not be possible to find a lasting solution, over and above the legal identity this territory might adopt.

Once again, Peru wishes to express its support for the political process aimed at finding a negotiated solution to Kosovo's status. In that context, we support the work carried out by Mr. Ahtisaari, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, to define a status that will promote development and progress for all the people of Kosovo and strengthen stability in the region as a whole.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2006/906) and his Special Representative, Mr. Rücker, for his excellent briefing. I also welcome the presence of Ms. Raskovic-Ivic, President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, and thank her for addressing the Council.

The question of Kosovo has now reached a crucial stage. We have noted that, since the beginning of this year, with the joint efforts of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, some progress has been made in implementing the standards. However, challenges remain in areas such as security guarantees, the return of refugees and ethnic harmony.

Given the situation on the ground in Kosovo, we believe that there can be hope for Kosovo's future only if the momentum for standards implementation is maintained and a breakthrough is achieved in establishing a harmonious and multi-ethnic society. We hope that the Provisional Institutions and their leaders will, with UNMIK's assistance, overcome the current difficulties and implement the standards in a comprehensive and effective manner. The other parties concerned should also provide positive cooperation.

The future status process for Kosovo has been under way for nearly a year. With the assistance of Mr. Ahtisaari, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, the Serbian Government and the Kosovo authorities

have engaged in contacts and carried out dialogues and negotiations at various levels and in various places. While some progress has been made, the parties continue to hold opposing positions. Despite the great difficulties facing this endeavour, China believes that it is extremely important and that the efforts should continue. That will help to push the future status process in the right direction.

China is concerned about the individual incidents of violence that have occurred recently in Kosovo. We hope that both sides will exercise restraint and continue their dialogue in a flexible, pragmatic and constructive spirit in order to find a mutually acceptable solution.

We have also noted that Special Envoy Ahtisaari has indicated that he will submit a conclusive report early next year. We hope that his recommendations will play a constructive role in resolving the question of Kosovo's future status.

The question of Kosovo is sensitive and complicated; it has a direct bearing on peace and stability in the Balkans and the neighbouring regions. Whether the question of Kosovo can be appropriately resolved is a source of concern to all. In resolving the question of Kosovo, we need to listen to the views of all parties, especially those of neighbouring countries. We must be mindful of the possible impact that the modalities of a settlement could have on neighbouring regions. Any settlement must lead to a lasting resolution of the question of Kosovo; it must not create new turmoil or have a negative impact on the stability of other regions.

China has always abided by the principle in international law that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries must be respected.

The international community and the Security Council should be impartial on the question of the future status of Kosovo and encourage both sides to seek a mutually acceptable plan through constructive negotiations on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to be brief. I have 10 points, so please forgive me if they come across rather bluntly.

First, I would like to welcome Special Representative Rücker, Prime Minister Çeku and Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic. They are very welcome in the Council.

Secondly, the United Kingdom condemns, unreservedly, the violence in Kosovo and elsewhere in the region. The perpetrators — be they Kosovo Albanian, Kosovo Serb or of another ethnicity — must be brought to justice. But I would caution against concluding from this that the Kosovo authorities themselves are guilty of that violence.

All sides should refrain from violence and respect the rule of law and the Contact Group Guiding Principles, which have been endorsed by the Council. If violence happens once status is settled, there will be consequences for Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration.

Thirdly, it is clear from the contributions of the Special Representative and members of the Council that there has been progress on standards implementation, and that is extremely welcome. The Kosovo authorities and Mr. Rücker deserve our thanks and our support for making further progress.

Fourthly, standards do not end with status settlement. They are part of the integral framework for European Union and NATO integration. Should there be a breakdown post-settlement, there will be consequences for that integration.

Fifthly, with regard to participation, it is disappointing that, once again, members of the Council are having to call on Belgrade to allow Kosovo Serbs to take part constructively in negotiations about their own future. Belgrade is not protecting the Kosovo Serbs by not letting them participate. What it is protecting is its own hard line, and members of the Council have said today that they do not find that acceptable. We have called on Serbia several times to encourage the Kosovo Serbs to engage. It is extremely disappointing that once again they continue to defy the Council in this matter.

Sixthly, I would like to say that the United Kingdom considers itself a friend of Serbia. We want to help Serbia to integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions. We have recently joined with our NATO colleagues and allies in welcoming Serbia and other countries in the region into Partnership for Peace. It is disappointing that the hand of friendship extended by NATO and by countries like my own in bringing Serbia into Partnership for Peace is not matched by a reciprocal willingness on the part of Serbia to assume its rightful place in Europe and to engage in good-neighbourly relations.

If I may, Mr. President, I would like to refer to the letter sent to you today by Prime Minister Çeku of Kosovo, in which he says, "We do not seek to avoid Serbia, we seek to meet them as neighbours in a stable and mature partnership". We call on Serbia to reciprocate that. It is important to have a Europe that is whole and free. We cannot do that without Serbia, but, equally, we are not responsible for Serbia's isolation, which is being imposed by Belgrade.

As my seventh point, I very much welcome what Ms. Raskovic-Ivic said about the rule of the law governing Serbia's actions. That is extremely welcome, but it needs to be put into practice. In particular, we call on Belgrade to transfer Mladic and Karadzic to the Hague Tribunal. Those two men are responsible, and have been indicted, for the massacre at Srebrenica of 7,000 Muslim men and boys. We also call on Belgrade to stop encouraging the separatists in Republika Srpska and to stop interfering in Bosnia's internal affairs. The Dayton Peace Agreement has established what Bosnia is: a State with two entities, one of which is Republika Srpska. There is no read across — nor will we let there be any read across — between the settlement of Kosovo's status and that of other countries in the region, including Bosnia.

A number of speakers today have raised the issue of status. The important thing is that the Council must back our Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, whose appointment by the Secretary-General we endorsed. Ms. Raskovic-Ivic mentioned the Serbian Constitution and the Serbian platform. We respect the right of the Serb people to express their views. But in terms of the settlement of Kosovo's status, the Serb platform and the Serb Constitution are sideshows. The only show in town is the Ahtisaari status process and the Contact Group's January and July statements, with which the United Nations, the EU, NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as members of the Contact Group, have associated themselves. That is a substantive and substantial body of States Members of the United Nations. It is an important set of documents. We look to Belgrade to stop its campaign of vilification of Mr. Ahtisaari. It achieves nothing and only diminishes Serbia in the eyes of the United Nations and its Member States.

My next point is to note that we have taken this long to settle Kosovo's status out of a wish to be able to bring Belgrade along. But I think it is becoming increasingly clear that Belgrade does not wish to engage with us and does not wish to engage with the Status Envoy in settling the status. That is a pity, as many members of the Council have said today. We would far prefer a negotiated solution. But the Contact Group has also laid down an alternative route, if that is not possible.

Finally, on the nature of the status settlement itself, it is not for me or anyone in the United Kingdom to say what the status should be. As I have said, that is for Mr. Ahtisaari to do. At the same time, I think that we should all recognize that there is a growing consensus on the part of many observers that any settlement is likely to be based on some form of independence for Kosovo, supervised by a robust international civilian and military presence and with cast-iron guarantees protecting the rights and security of Kosovo's minority communities. Such an outcome would be consistent with the Contact Group Guiding Principles and Contact Group ministerial statements, echoed by many in the Council today, regarding a settlement that is acceptable to the majority of people in Kosovo. It is difficult to identify any sustainable alternative options that provide a better basis for developing Kosovo's democratic future and wide regional stability. And, of course, any settlement must enshrine the standards that we have discussed today — standards on which the international community rightly remains focused, and which form the bedrock of any country's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Mr. Faaborg-Andersen (Denmark): I, like others, would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Rücker, for his useful briefing. I would also like to thank the President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic, for her statement, and the Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo, Mr. Çeku, for his presence.

I associate myself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

We are pleased to note that the Provisional Institutions have made significant efforts to improve standards implementation since the previous report. Denmark would like to welcome the commitment to move forward shown by the Administration in Pristina,

especially on the 13 priority points identified by the Contact Group. However, there are a number of areas where further attention is needed, not least with regard to the rule of law and freedom of movement. Violence — whether or not ethnically motivated — undermines reconciliation and threatens progress, and we condemn the recent spate of violent incidents.

We welcome the concrete steps taken by the Provisional Institutions to improve conditions for Kosovo's minorities. However, it is also clear that these steps do not automatically improve relations between the majority and the minorities. The leadership of the Provisional Institutions needs to create confidence among all of Kosovo's ethnic groups. That can be achieved only by reaching out and by showing a genuine willingness to compromise.

We are very concerned about the steps taken by the Kosovo Serb municipalities in northern Kosovo to end contacts with the Provisional Institutions and set up parallel structures. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, by remaining outside the political process in Kosovo, the Kosovo Serb leaders are doing a disservice to their community. We thus urge Belgrade to encourage the Kosovo Serb representatives to participate constructively in the Provisional Institutions in Pristina, not least in the municipal bodies.

We all hope for a sustainable solution to Kosovo's future. Non-cooperation, isolation and entrenched positions will not lead to a better future. Flexibility and compromise are prerequisites for a sustainable solution, and coordinated and forward-looking actions on the part of all actors will be required. The primary beneficiaries will be all Kosovars, regardless of ethnicity; the population of the Republic of Serbia; and, indeed, all the peoples of the western Balkans. Cooperation and participation is in everyone's best interest.

In that context, we would like to reiterate our full support for the Status Envoy, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari. We welcome his intention to present proposals for a comprehensive status settlement to the parties after the parliamentary elections in Serbia.

In our view, dragging out the process of resolving the Kosovo status issue will not benefit regional stability. The solution should meet the aspirations of the majority of Kosovars and, at the same time, include adequate minority protection and guarantees.

Denmark views the situation in Kosovo from a regional perspective. We steadfastly support UNMIK and KFOR. We look forward to the more peaceful and prosperous future which the peoples of the region deserve. That will entail close regional cooperation towards the common integration of these truly European countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures, where they rightfully belong. However, the Euro-Atlantic perspective depends on the implementation of standards and a sustainable solution to Kosovo's future status.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Qatar.

I should like to welcome Mr. Rücker, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kosovo, and to thank him for briefing the Council. We commend him and all members of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for their efforts. I wish also to welcome Ms. Raskovic-Ivic.

The crisis in Kosovo has been going on for far too long, as has the suffering of the peoples of that territory. It is time to resolve that crisis and to find a solution to all the problems resulting therefrom. It is encouraging to witness the significant efforts that have been made so far to that end. The United Nations has played a central role in those efforts alongside other parties.

Those efforts have begun to bear fruit. State institutions in Kosovo have started to take shape and are managing the territory's affairs and serving its people in an efficient and stable manner. However, the territory continues to require a great deal of support from the international community and the United Nations in order to strengthen its institutions and ensure stability and development.

Achieving long-term stability, however, will require settling the status of the territory. In that regard, the positions of both parties are still largely at odds. But it is encouraging to see that dialogue is continuing, which has helped to resolve numerous technical, constitutional, legal and other issues.

One of the conditions for finding a permanent settlement concerning the future of Kosovo involves ensuring the effective participation by Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in the Government and in all State

and social activities, which, in turn, should be based on a recognition of a multi-ethnic society. All segments of society must take part in the dialogue on the future status of the territory, as that would endow it with legitimacy and sustainability. Both parties should encourage such participation and refrain from any act that would hinder or undermine it.

The efforts made to achieve progress and implement the special standards for Kosovo and the 13 priority areas identified and submitted by the Contact Group to the Kosovo Government are promising, but those steps should be completed in order to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The level of return of refugees remains unacceptably low, due to the economic situation, which is still in need of improvement. The international community must support that process. However, a more important reason for the low number of returnees is the uncertainty and ambiguity that prevail with respect to the future status of Kosovo.

In closing, we commend the role of UNMIK, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Kosovo Contact Group for their efforts to strengthen stability, promote development and determine the future status of the territory of Kosovo.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Finland.

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the pleasure to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway members of the European Economic Area and Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

Let me begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Joachim Rücker, for his clear presentation. I would like once again to underline the European Union's continued support for the Special Representative, Mr. Rücker, in his efforts to implement resolution 1244 (1999) and to prepare for the transition between UNMIK and the future international presence in Kosovo once the status of Kosovo has been determined.

As the Secretary-General notes, the status negotiations and initial preparations for the end of UNMIK's mandate and for the transition period have indeed characterized the past months. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari has since the beginning of this year actively pursued engagement with both Belgrade and Pristina through direct talks and expert consultations in such key areas as community rights, decentralization, the protection of cultural and religious heritage, as well as the economy.

Regarding the future status of Kosovo, Belgrade and Pristina have, unfortunately, continued to express diametrically opposed positions. As the Secretary-General remarks in paragraph 2 of his report, these talks have enabled the two sides "to engage in a substantial exchange of views ... without resulting, however, in any major shifts of position".

The EU continues to encourage both Belgrade and Pristina to engage constructively in the status process. However, the process should not be open-ended, and neither party should unilaterally block or derail the process, for example, by resorting to violence.

We fully share the view of the Secretary-General, who noted with dismay that violent attacks continue to be made by a few in an attempt to effect political change. He also observed that the political process cannot be dictated by the streets and that violence will not be tolerated.

The EU continues to fully support the United Nations Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, and his conduct of the political process to determine Kosovo's future status. We welcome his intention to present a proposal for a comprehensive status settlement to the parties after the parliamentary elections in Serbia that will be held on 21 January.

We share the Secretary-General's view of generally positive developments in Kosovo. In its annual progress reports for the Western Balkan countries, and also for Kosovo, the Commission of the European Union welcomes the progress in Kosovo in the transfer of responsibilities to the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. At the same time, we stress the crucial importance of further accelerated and

effective implementation of the standards, which are equally essential for Kosovo's European perspective.

More efforts are needed to create an administrative environment that will ensure further approximation of European standards. We also stress the need for further efforts for full respect of the rule of law and independence of the judicial system. The issues of combating organized crime and corruption, macroeconomic stability and the protection of all communities living in Kosovo also need the special attention of the Kosovo authorities.

The future status settlement will be a challenging task, not only for Serbia and Kosovo, but also for the whole international community. It will require coordinated and forward-looking action from all actors involved. However, the status settlement alone will not solve Kosovo's pressing economic and social problems. Those challenges will remain and will need to tackled with new vigour.

The future status settlement should safeguard a future for all the citizens of Kosovo in a multi-ethnic and democratic society and be conducive to economic and social development.

The Western Balkan region, including Kosovo, has been given a European perspective. The EU has a major interest in a positive and clear outcome of the status process. Its success will be essential, not only for providing a clear perspective for the people in Kosovo, but also for the overall stability of the region. In this context, maintaining the European perspective of Serbia is of great importance. Also, we would like to make it clear that we see the question of Kosovo's status as sui generis. The outcome of the status process will not set a precedent for other regions because its current status is exceptional, being based on Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

We regret the fact that the Kosovo Serbs still do not participate in the work of the central institutions in Kosovo, despite the international community's repeated calls for them to do so. We once again urge Belgrade to encourage Serbs in Kosovo to engage in the work of the Kosovo institutions, where they can most effectively advocate their own interests. It is crucial to understand and to ensure that all communities have a place in Kosovo, regardless of its future status.

The EU continues its support for the Kosovo institutions in their efforts to implement the reform agenda. The EU is firmly committed to supporting Kosovo's political and economic development, and we are preparing our future presence in Kosovo with other international actors. It is essential that UNMIK stays with full powers until that future presence is established. Well-coordinated action among various international organizations and assistance from other donors are vital to ensure effective implementation of the status settlement and the sustainable development of Kosovo. The EU will assume its role in that regard.

A long-term commitment of the donor community will be indispensable to ensure a stable and secure Kosovo for all its citizens. A strong post-status international presence would also be needed to support the Kosovo institutions so as to ensure security and stability, as well as to safeguard the multi-ethnic character of the new Kosovo.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kryzhanivskyi (Ukraine): Allow me to welcome you, Sir, as Security Council President for the month of December.

I also welcome the presence of the President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, Ms. Sanda Raskovic-Ivic, and the Prime Minister of Kosovo, His Excellency Mr. Agim Çeku, in this Chamber.

I would like to join my colleagues in thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2006/906) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Joachim Rücker, for his informative briefing.

I shall confine myself to several points of crucial importance, as seen from the perspective of Ukraine. The Secretary-General's report highlights certain progress in the implementation of standards, now aligned with the European Partnership Action Plan. While welcoming these positive developments, we believe that, as a critical prerequisite for Kosovo's long-term unity and stability, the work needs to be further continued and intensified.

The province's leadership should make particular efforts to ensure that Kosovo remains multi-ethnic and democratic in nature, with respect for civil liberties and

the rights of national and religious minorities. Further attention is needed to solve the problems of government decentralization and the protection of minorities' cultural and inheritance rights. It is also of paramount importance that the Kosovo government reaches out to the Serb population and makes them partners in the ongoing transformation, and that Belgrade encourages such endeavours.

The Secretary-General report underlines the increasing tension in Kosovo as the negotiations on the future status move forward. We are disturbed by the fact that ethnically and politically motivated crimes continued during the reporting period, some of which being obvious attempts to pressure the international actors. We therefore fully share the clear message in the Secretary-General's report that political developments and timelines will not be dictated by the streets and violence will not be tolerated.

As an active contributor to international and regional peace and security, Ukraine will continue to participate in the peaceful efforts of the international community in Kosovo. We favour the conclusion of a mutually acceptable compromise decision between Belgrade and Pristina, under active international mediation and in full compliance with relevant Security Council decisions, including resolution 1244 (1999).

Ukraine strongly believes in the need to attain a final settlement of the political, economic and security situation in Kosovo through the creation of adequate conditions for the return of the non-Albanian population and through the guarantee of human rights, including those of all ethnic groups.

My country cautions against any hasty or unilateral steps that could destabilize the situation in the region. We believe that current negotiations need to be prolonged based on the recognized norms and principles of international law. It is with particular concern that we perceive declarations about the so-called universal nature or precedence of a Kosovo settlement. Such approaches may pose the risk that some countries, particularly in international organizations, could use their influence in the future to advance analogous scenarios in other regions with frozen conflicts, above all within the post-Soviet space.

The international magnitude of the Kosovo issue, as well as the unstable situation in the region, certainly require a continued civil and security presence of the international community on the ground. At the same time, Ukraine considers one possibility — the European Union decision on the international mandate over the territory of Kosovo for a certain period time — to be a transitional measure.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of Albania.

Mr. Neritani (Albania): Let me thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Joachim Rücker, for presenting a clear picture of the reality on the ground in Kosovo. His continued steadfastness at the helm of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), at this very critical stage as one chapter comes to a close, has established a proven record of keeping all stakeholders engaged in the necessary transition to the forthcoming stage.

The Albanian Government will continue to support efforts towards the goal of a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo. I take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his hard work and commitment to finding a solution to this matter. We also thank UNMIK, the Kosovo Force, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union for their continuing dedication and commitment in Kosovo. The latter's ongoing resolve is an extremely important contribution to the smooth and harmoniously coordinated transition that will shape the basics of the post-status period.

I would also like to welcome the presence of Prime Minister Çeku in the Security Council. We congratulate him on the commitment he has shown throughout this year to the implementation of standards, and especially to the 13 priority points identified by the Contact Group, as the UNMIK report explicitly states. The implementation of the programmes, by reaching out to all the people of Kosovo, has strengthened Kosovo's institutions and helped build a future foundation for the hard work ahead. We are confident that the established institutions and those to come will continue to offer effective governance in building a viable, multi-ethnic and prosperous Kosovo for all its citizens.

I also welcome the presence of Ms. Raskovic-Ivic as the representative of the Serbian delegation.

I thank the Secretary-General for his latest report and express my delegation's appreciation for that realistic and substantive document.

We are pleased with the overall assessment that further progress and significant achievements continue to be the dominant rationale in Kosovo. The successful implementation of standards; the institutional ability to understand and to advance progress by reaching out to all the people of Kosovo; the improvement of services delivered; and a clear orientation towards democratic principles and values are some of the elements underlined in the report. It is to be welcomed and encouraged that the standards programme has been incorporated into and become an integral part of the European Partnership Action Plan and that the Government has already created structures and concrete plans to implement it. This clearly reflects the fact that, even at this critical stage, Kosovo is pursuing the chosen path of institution-building and minority accommodation.

It is also to be emphasized that the security situation has not been adversely affected by the ongoing future status process. We share the view that this situation must not be taken for granted over an unrealistically extended period of time and that it has to be adapted accordingly as the evolving situation on the ground in Kosovo dictates.

Keeping pace with the current political momentum requires bold and determined action by all parties and actors involved in the process. Further backsliding after the important deadline of January 2007 may seriously jeopardize an orderly Kosovo settlement and exhaust many bonds that have to date kept the process a promising one in a good cause. We are pleased that the need to deliver results sooner rather than latter is commonly understood and widely accepted by the Council and key Member States. Their unity and level of certainty is an indispensable element in delivering a result that will be acceptable to the people of Kosovo.

We share the view explicitly stated in the report that it is equally essential that Kosovo Serb leaders participate fully in the political process in Kosovo. Remaining outside of the process is a disservice to their community. As the report so clearly states, Belgrade authorities should respond to the coherent policy of the international community by removing all impediments to Kosovo Serb participation in Kosovo institutions. Now is the right time to solve the issue and not to try raising the stakes at the negotiating table.

At the same time, we appeal to the Kosovo Albanians to redouble their efforts to ensure the freedom and rights of minorities and to increase their outreach to all communities. We hold the view that Albanians and Serbs alike in Kosovo should leave their past behind, engage in reconciliation, strengthen their cooperation and look to their common future.

The Albanian Government continues to support the substantive dialogue between the representatives of the Albanians and the Serbs and calls upon both sides to exhibit a realistic understanding. The dialogue has started and will have to produce a result based upon the reality on the ground in Kosovo. An understandable exhaustion does not have to keep the necessary outcome in limbo indefinitely. We are pleased with the moderate progress on technical issues.

The political process to determine Kosovo's final status has objectively and by definition entered its final stage. The success or lack thereof towards an orderly political settlement will greatly depend on the continued constructive approach of all parties and actors involved. Albania will continue to play an active role and offer a constructive approach. We continue to hold the view that the status process should proceed steadily and swiftly. Further delay or any artificial status quo would prolong instability, uncertainty and institutional paralysis and serve nobody's interest, in or out of region.

We continue to share the international support for President Ahtisaari and his team. We reiterate our strong support for the Contact Group's guiding principles that there should be no change of borders, no partition of Kosovo, and no union with any other country or part of any other country.

We support a realistic solution acceptable to the people of Kosovo, fully grounded in the current reality of that specific case. The solution should be clearly defined in its political and legal aspects, and without any ambiguity; otherwise, it would tend to undermine the orderly process of reaching an acceptable status and rehabilitation thereafter. The outcome should contribute to ending the unpredictability and uncertainty that stem from the current lack of status, and strengthen the stability and security of Kosovo and the entire region.

We stress our strong conviction that the most realistic, pragmatic and just solution to this matter is independence, with a supportive continuation of the

civil and security presence of the international community. In other words, it must include the promotion and protection of Serbs' and all other minorities' rights and their cultural and religious heritage, and build a society in which all the people of Kosovo can live in dignity and prosperity and without fear.

We are encouraged that the Kosovo leadership, civil society, media, other relevant institutions and the broader community are demonstrating political and social cohesion, growing unity and cooperation with the international community in sharing responsibilities for building such a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo, integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures. We are confident that independence will generate and guarantee social and economic stability and security for Kosovo and the whole region, and help to establish a sustainable, multi-ethnic and democratic society there. It will pave the way for the European perspective. Albania shares the broader view that the international military and civilian presence in Kosovo, even after the determination of the final status, will be essential to the success of all those endeavours.

In conclusion, let me assure this body that the Albanian Government will continue to take a constructive approach by actively playing its helpful and moderating role in the region. We will continue to be a reliable partner in full support of Mr. Ahtisaari and his mission throughout the upcoming process and beyond.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The President of the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija has asked for the floor again. I now give the floor to Ms. Raskovic-Ivic.

Ms. Raskovic-Ivic (Serbia): I would like to thank everybody for the many constructive proposals and comments made during the discussion, which I understood as expressing strong support for the negotiating process. I would nevertheless like to make a few clarifications.

On several occasions during the debate, I heard reference to the argument regarding the uncertainty of Kosovo Albanians as a reason for haste. I think that the uncertainty argument is not a good one, because the status and the situation that prevailed in Kosovo and Metohija and in Serbia prior to 1999 will never again prevail. That is especially true in the light of the future European prospects for the entire South-Eastern Balkan region.

I would like to say a few words about the participation of Serbs in the Institutions. First of all, Serbs living in Kosovo and Metohija do not have confidence, because freedom of movement is not what it should be and because there are still many attacks on people as they move about and commute from place to place.

There is also another issue involved, because participation is a complex matter that is not solely about confidence or security. There is no mechanism to prevent out-voting. I must remind the Council that when the Return Coalition was actively participating it submitted 72 amendments. Only two were adopted, and 70 were rejected. Serbs from that Coalition therefore always had the feeling that they were just there for decoration. The participation of Serbs in Kosovo should be meaningful. That is why we need a mechanism to prevent out-voting. Such a mechanism would be the best way to carry out negotiations, especially in the working group on community rights.

Then, of course, representatives in Kosovo and Metohija from the Serbian list are legal but they are not legitimate. That is because, out of the 140,000 Serbs in Kosovo and the 250,000 in Serbia and Montenegro that have the right to vote in Kosovo, only 811 persons voted.

I would also like to refer to the contention that Kosovo is a sui generis case. From our point of view — and not only as Serbs, for there are others who share our feelings and views — the issue of Kosovo is, by its very essence, a matter of precedent, not a sui generis case.

With regard to the comments of Ms. Lintonen, I agree with and welcome many of the things she said. I also commit myself and the Coordination Centre of the Republic of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija to cooperate with the European Union on technical and all other matters.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Raskovic-Ivic for her comments.

I now give the floor to Mr. Rücker to reply to comments and questions that have been raised.

Mr. Rücker: I am very grateful for the understanding we have experienced in this round of

discussions on developments in Kosovo, as well as for the recognition regarding the progress that has been made in standards implementation, which I think is to the credit not only of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) but, in particular, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government.

With regard to the status process, I do not comment on the very substance of the status process. But it is, in my view, our mandate to point out to the Council the objective costs that are associated with the continued lack of clarity on status. I hope that was clear from my statement. In addition, it is our mandate to facilitate the transition period: we do indeed have a role with regard to the transition period, and we want to bring that process to an orderly conclusion.

Many representatives mentioned incidents of violence in Kosovo. Let me assure the Council that we not only condemn violence wherever and in whatever form it occurs in Kosovo, but we and our Institutions see to it that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

With regard to the figures mentioned in Ms. Raskovic-Ivic statement, they do not match our close monitoring of the situation. We would be happy to share the real figures on those incidents with Belgrade and with the Council. However, as I have said, every incident is one incident too many, and we do bring perpetrators to justice. I would be happy to go into detail as necessary.

With regard to the presentation made by my Serbian colleague, I do not want to go into detail about what was said about UNMIK going beyond its mandate. However, perhaps I could address just one point. UNMIK is certainly not seeking a State for Albanians in Kosovo; and certainly UNMIK is working for a democratic and, in any fashion, a multi-ethnic Kosovo.

Statements dwelled on some of the issues in standards implementation where further progress is needed. I fully agree that there needs to be further progress in a number of areas. But that progress depends in part upon status — for example, in the economy. How can an emerging economy like Kosovo's develop without access to international lending or to borrowing, which is not possible until there is a resolution of the status issue?

With regard to the question of returns, there also we depend on status, because there is uncertainty and we know that many potential returnees are waiting for a decision on status.

Other issues have also been mentioned, such as decentralization and protection of cultural heritage. People are aware that Martti Ahtisaari has been negotiating with the parties on how those problems should be addressed and how there could be good tangible solutions to them. With regard to the pilot municipalities for decentralization, for example, people are now waiting for the issuance of a status proposal by the Special Envoy.

Other progress in standards implementation clearly depends upon the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the Institutions, as well as upon their recognition of the Institutions. In that connection, I was very grateful that so many speakers stressed the need for Kosovo Serbs to actually take those steps. Only by participating in the Institutions will they be able to influence developments in Kosovo properly. It is very important that this takes place, and I would again appeal to Belgrade to make it happen. I think freedom of movement is not an impeding factor for that. Outvoting should also not be a decisive criterion. We urge Kosovo Serbs to come to the Institutions and to engage and to recognize the Institutions.

The situation would be better in many respects if that were really to happen. For example, it is very good that we now have movement toward payment to KEK for electricity, which represents considerable progress. Also, with regard to the telecommunication issue, it is very clear that those providers that Sanda Raskovic-Ivic has mentioned have no license in Kosovo and have not paid any taxes there. However, they are encouraged to participate in the current tender for a second license for mobile telephoning in Kosovo.

All in all, I think confidence-building and dialogue are key. I urge the Kosovo Serbs and the minorities in general to take the hand being extended by the PISG and their representatives. We will work hard with this Council and under the direction of the Secretary-General to come to a good conclusion of the still-open question of Kosovo.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Rücker for those clarifications.

There are no other speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.